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LE TORRENT BY ANNE HEBERT: A TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

by



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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled LE TORRENT BY ANNE HEBERT: A TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY submitted by Francis Maria Macri in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## ABSTRACT

A translation is always a difficult undertaking. The Commentary that precedes this particular translation of Le Torrent, attempts to point out the ways and means by which various authors and critics have treated the problem.

The problem is essentially one of approach, rather than of method. Methods are difficult to formulate infallibly in the case of translating from language to language. However, a method can be described linguistically and can facilitate the transfer between languages. The matter of approach concerns the translator's affinity with the text he works with, and the definition of exactly what takes place in the actual process of transfer. Important questions arise in this instance, requiring clarification and expansion: questions such as, what is the nature of language, what predominates in the exchange between languages--interpretation or translation? Interpretation is the mere transference of meaning, while translation is equivalence as total as possible regarding meaning and style, or form and content. Since language is not a nomenclature but an ensemble of structures, it must be approached with an understanding of its nature and the demands that very nature makes on those who would use it to translate.

Literary translation further increases the exigences of ordinary non-literary transference. Because form in litera-





ture is an integral part of meaning, this integrity must somehow be preserved in translation, though differently in the target language which makes specific formal demands of its own, yet logically so as to reflect the merits and qualities of the original in the source language. To best achieve such logical substitution, it is necessary to formulate a clear understanding of what happens in the literary use of language, and how such use makes greater demands on some aspects of language that are only potential in its non-literary use.

A knowledgeable translator will be able to demonstrate the process as it takes place, between French and English in this case, and to illuminate the common problems that always occur when doing such translation.

A translation of Le Torrent is not solely an exercise in the art. If it is a valuable contribution, it will illuminate a darkness that language has unfortunately caused. In the history of Canadian literature, Le Torrent takes on an emblematic character typifying the tradition of which it is a part. Thus, the work of Anne Hébert cannot be ignored, not even in translation. As a poet, Anne Hébert can be placed alongside Emile Nelligan, Saint-Denys Garneau, Rina Lasnier, P.K. Page, Margaret Avison and Jay Macpherson. As a prose work, Le Torrent ranks with Sheila Watson's The Double Hook, and resembles this work in tone and meaning. Outside Canadian literature, Anne Hébert stands beside the best modern writers, their equal, sometimes surpassing them.



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## ON TRANSLATION

### Introduction

The subject of translation and translating is wide and varied. Its origins are lost in time, going back to the first interpreters used by opposing armies in antiquity, to the first recorders of myths and magic. No doubt it would be fairly safe to assume that most civilizations assimilated their traditions in a form of "cultural translation," really a form of transition. Though languages are each a cosmology in themselves, that is, each language divides and names the universe in its own way, there is nevertheless a trade back and forth between different societies that may or may not be related linguistically. Even if each group considered its own language to be that of human civilization, and the language of its enemies (known or unknown) to be barbaric gibberish, this same xenophobic mass of men often took the precaution of knowing its enemies at least half as well as itself. Generally, this is how translation or interpretation of foreign tongues began: out of military and/or religious necessity. Sacred books or tablets or recitations had to be transferred from formlessness into form. The formlessness was often borrowed





from the imagination of one's enemies. The form was the visible or concrete sign.

Therefore, as men in different cultures began to realize the extent of linguistic diversity around them, they took to the task of making equivalences between languages. The primary impulse to do so is a communicative one, the desire to understand what seems to be incomprehensible. Meaning, not the medium, is the focus of concentration for the first "translators." The thought behind the utterance is searched out. The strategy of the saying is pinpointed. Thus, word for word rendering is the first method of approach since every sign has a meaning, a referent. Surely this method was combersome, if not inaccurate? It is difficult to say without attempting a translation of Hittite, for example, into ancient Egyptian. But one must assume that if the meaning is what preoccupied the mind of the interpreter, and if his own language was the human one, the word for word rendering of gibberish was procedurally correct.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of the inadequacies of literal interpretation, equivalence is still possible because of the universality of human experience. Only the particularization of experience would present problems to any translator. This universality of experience is best illustrated by the sacred writings of different cultures. Apart from the military use



of interpretation, the translation of holy writ is a most important activity in early history. There are the Greek and then Latin versions of Hebrew Scripture. St. Jerome appears as the first great translator and leaves us this dictum: "non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu."<sup>2</sup> This exhortation to follow the sense of things rather than their form was somewhat dangerous to early translators of Scripture. Edmond Cary tells how St. Jerome himself was quick to modify his statement in regards to Holy Scripture where the words and their order constituted a mystery in themselves.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, when God spoke He meant to have every one of his words translated. In fact, translation, through its journey from oriental sources, to the Arabic, to Latin, to the French of the thirteenth century, caused the Catholic Church's elevation of Barlaam and Josaphat to sainthood.<sup>4</sup>

Next to St. Jerome stands Martin Luther as patron of translators. Luther's Bible was consistent with the ideas of the Protestant Reformation, and it also demonstrated not only a trend to the popularization of holy writings, but also a general rise in the interest in books and booklore. This interest was instated by the Renaissance which placed the written word over the spoken, as demonstrated by Cary:

La distinction établie aujourd'hui entre la "traduction" (de textes écrits) et "l'interprétation" (orale) est récente. C'est la Renaissance qui a intronisé le livre dans notre civilisation. Si bien que l'écrit a supplanté le parlé et que la "traduction" en est venue à être considérée comme une activité inférieure.<sup>5</sup>



We note a very early development in translation, one that is concomitant with the precedence of the written word. The late Middle Ages, without quibbling over dates, in Europe north of Italy was already engaged in forms of transmitting one language into another; this transmission was not in deference to the words of books but rather part of the single matrix of western civilization. Language, namely Latin, was common property. In the British Isles the universal tongue was changed first into Mercian and other dialects, which are considered as Anglo-Saxon (King Alfred and Aelfric), then infused with Norman French. The British language extended its boundaries to include Europe. In France a similar assimilation of the universal Latin produced a national tongue. The whole process of assimilation, of borrowings between languages, of concern for expression, resembles a limitless process of translation. National feelings begin in the Middle Ages for Europe, and they are aided and abetted by transference of meaning from one form of linguistic communication to another. Both literary expression and popular expression of the time had common roots: Latin and indigenous dialects. This mixing of sources and inspirations is what leads inevitably to the Renaissance and Luther's Bible:

Les Chaucer et les Chrétien de Troyes ont tantôt traduit, tantôt adapté, tantôt brodé librement sur un thème ou composé en suivant leur inspiration personnelle. A leurs yeux, toutes ces opérations ne se confondaient-elles pas? Ne peut-on pas se





demander si l'humble récitant, qui paraphrasait dans une autre langue un texte qui l'avait séduit, ne se montrait pas souvent plus fidèle que le clerc qui, la plume à la main, se sentait appelé à faire oeuvre d'auteur en traduisant un poème par écrit?

Cette confusion est sans doute inévitable quand la langue en est à ses premiers balbutiements et ne possède pas encore de littérature propre. La traduction a, en règle générale, précédé la création littéraire autonome, elle a été la grande accoucheuse des littératures. Ainsi le poète tibétain Milarepa a-t-il pour maître le mage-traducteur Marpa (qui comme Saint Jérôme, a un livre et un crâne pour attributs).<sup>6</sup>

This modest production of literature was outstripped, especially during the Renaissance, by the frequent and wide use of translation by Church and State. Politics and religion, always intermingling, in the early periods of history remain the strongest contributors to the accumulation of translated materials. However, the Renaissance and the period following immediately thereafter, do leave a very large residue of translations from Greek and Latin, of literary, philosophical and religious texts, all of which were to be aesthetic as well as meaningful. Here truly begins the first large body of comment on the very act of translating. Numerous introductions, prefaces and notes provide a wealth of information not just on what takes place between two languages when they exchange meanings, but on an organic theory of art, beauty and truth:

Les modestes jongleurs qui répétaient les récits qu'ils avaient écoutés, les clercs, qui mettaient en vers des livres d'histoire, les poètes





qui se piquaient d'émulation avec les grands disparus font piètre figure à côté des pontifes et des seigneurs diplomates. Ils apportaient cependant à la traduction un cadeau que nul autre ne pouvait lui offrir. Ils en faisaient un art. Et, désormais, c'est dans les innombrables "Art de traduire" qu'on doit chercher les vues théoriques des siècles successifs sur la traduction.<sup>7</sup>

The "Art of Translation" becomes as important as an Ars Poetica.

These beginnings of translation become in time the important literary activity that today interests the comparatist. The lingua franca that once characterized European civilization was a true attempt at a common means of communication, a sort of instantaneous translating of thought into universally accessible signs or words. However, in spite of this, the act of transference or equivalence of meaning between languages persisted in writing. The enormous interest and energy expended in art, literature, philosophy, history, commerce, exploration and religion, could only have been aided and developed through the use of translation, or through contacts and influences between peoples whose individuals sometimes spoke other than their mother tongue. From the beginning, translation was considered an art because what was beautiful in its original state was to be the same in its copy, version or adaptation:

Ce que nous nommons traduction dans le sens le plus couramment admis de nos jours procède de cette double source: l'humble rigueur des traducteurs sacrés s'allie à la libre recherche artistique des littéraires. Elle est la synthèse de ces deux tendances antinomiques.<sup>7</sup>



This synthesis has left us a legacy of masterworks, essays, histories, treatises, and literary curiosa.

For the comparatist the study of translation as a method and as a medium is necessary. The access to world literature is at first provided through a "second" original. When a scholar attains a level of competence in one or more foreign languages, he may want to begin comparing the originals with the translations to determine whether or not the translator has been true to his task. What is often discovered is that a great many "classic" translations are really versions, adaptations, or mistranslations. At this point, the comparatist will begin to study not the original, but this dubious copy in order to determine whether or not it can or should be improved. This procedure raises important questions of theory and practice, historical questions concerning definitions, and general questions on the validity of translating. For the comparative linguist the problem becomes something else. But the preoccupation with method also includes one with medium. The comparatist sees in translation the likeliest means of transmission of literary material between individuals, between groups, and between nations. Realizing this, he can embark on many different studies; for instance, sources and influences, themes and motifs, and so forth. In fact, Pichois and Rousseau see the development of comparative literature and translation as



parallel from the 18th century onwards. This is not completely coincidental, they believe, but indicative of a trend:

L'idée de la littérature comparée et celle de traduction objective se sont développées parallèlement depuis l'Ecossais Tytler à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ces changements sont liés à une révolution dans la conception du mot écrit, qui, de chose publique détachée de son auteur, que l'on se passe à volonté, dont on use sans vergogne, dont la valeur est dans l'usage, non dans la source, devint confession, message, cri jailli des entrailles, coeur mis à nu, chair pantelante de l'Artiste, Verbe enfin. On comprend, quand il s'agit de traduire des paroles aussi intimement unies à l'écrivain, qu'aucune transposition ne saurait être assez scrupuleuse. Le comparatiste, une fois encore, se heurte au problème des rapports entre la traduction, l'imitation et la création. Boileau est fait d'Horace, Proust de Ruskin.<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt of the importance of translation for the comparatist. Even when the student of comparative literature attempts the work of translating, his knowledge of the source language must be assisted by a knowledge of the translator's craft. Many factors are suddenly brought to bear during the act of changing an original into a "second" original. What happens? What does the translator need to know? What does the scholar-translator need to know? Why is his work important? How does it contribute to the corpus of general knowledge, if at all? All these questions need some kind of answer. An attempt to answer some of these questions will be made in the pages that follow. The next section will deal with theories, definition, methods and problems of





translation. It will be followed by a section on linguistics and translation, and then by one illustrating the actual problems encountered in translating Le Torrent. Finally, there will be a short literary introduction to this story by Anne Hébert.

### Theories, Definitions, Methods and Problems

In an introduction to a specific translation, it is more appropriate to expand on the theories, definitions, methods and problems of the subject at hand than to delve into its history in England and France and elsewhere. A history, though valuable, might possibly result in an endless recitation of names and titles. However, though the literary researcher is interested in these voyages between countries and their literatures, the scholar-translator must know his subject in more than just an historical way. It is not his purpose to navigate once more the countless voyages of preceding generations, but to understand the nature and life of his work. Translation is not a cut and dried process. It lives in the sense that it changes as it goes along, simply because the medium itself, language, is forever changing:

La manière de traduire les mêmes auteurs peut changer en l'espace de peu d'années, sans que les rapports grammaticaux et structurels entre les deux langues aient subi le moindre changement, mais simplement parce que les deux cultures seront venues à





se connaître plus intimement. C'est à mesure que s'accroissent et se précisent nos connaissances des mœurs d'un pays et des manières de faire, de sentir, de penser et de dire qui y règnent qu'une traduction plus proche de l'original devient possible. Tant qu'il y a ignorance, la traduction est inévitablement explicative.<sup>10</sup>

Inevitably, translation aspires to be more than just interpretation of meaning; it seeks to be artistic.

How does one go about translating? Explanations abound in the prefaces and introductions to the many works translated from earliest times. The reasons for translation are not always made clear, but one can understand them to be a desire to communicate and/or to be creative. To accomplish this is another matter. Words in the source language must be transferred with their meanings into the target language. According to the oldest explanations, this is what must be done. Thus, there is a great deal of literal translating. Words are given their equivalents in another language simply because they are inviolable objects in the original. The concept of words being complete in themselves can be compared to Plato's Idealism, there being meanings and then their concrete forms. Therefore, one need only make equivalence of signs, the meaning being absolute. The translator defers to the original inasmuch as he believes it to be inalterable in any way, even in another language. Syntax, diction and all the external, observable traits of the original must be transferred



to the copy. Thus, the monk or clerk translating "lupus in fabula" would render it, "the wolfe in the tale," enjoying a clever pun. Is this a mistranslation? Not to the one doing it, say, during the so-called Dark Ages. Translation, at its outset, was considered a uniform process of equivalence.

Words were words and had to be carried into the target language; their number was important as well. Therefore, it was simple to translate, though it may have been difficult to find equivalents in cases where the two languages shared no cognate forms.

For the most part, however, early translating was sufficiently smooth and easy because of the linguistic closeness of European languages sharing Latin as a common source. Flora Ross Amos in her book Early Theories of Translation,<sup>11</sup> contends that Elizabethan England took to translating in earnest, and that by the seventeenth century, translators such as Dryden were comparing their English versions with Italian and French versions of Horace and Virgil. Such an activity represented an advance on earlier ideas of translation, thereby indicating an interest in the process itself rather than its product alone. Chapman himself made the following statement in a preface to his rendering of Virgil's Eclogues into English:



Some readers I make no doubt they [the translations] will meet with in these dainty mouthed times, that will tax me with not coming resolved word for word and line for line with the author.... I used the freedom of a translator, not tying myself to the tyranny of a grammatical construction but breaking the shell into many pieces, was only careful to preserve the kernel safe and whole from the violence of a wrong or wrested interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Seventeenth-century Europe was not predisposed to carry on the long tradition of word for word, line by line translation. It began a renewal characterized by Dryden's renunciation of literalism in translating.<sup>13</sup> Now, those who translated began commenting on their own method as well as on past methods. St. Jerome's dictum became practice. Translators became concerned with style and less with exact meaning. This carries on through the eighteenth century to the nineteenth. The preoccupation in the "art" of translation is with the aesthetic. It is important that beauty be attained before everything else in the target language.

Beauty need not necessarily be an inherent quality in the original, but it must show in the result. Thus, translation becomes an aesthetic, a form of art criticism and theory borne out almost always by the high quality of the original. One conveys this quality rather than interpreting meaning. This is a view widely held in the nineteenth century and represented best by Matthew Arnold. Arnold insisted that translations of Greek classics should be identifiable as such, maintaining more





than anything else the qualities of the original language. Verse was especially difficult to render since the language possessed certain characteristics in the original that were impossible to capture in the target language. In such cases, even if unintelligibility is the price to pay, one must strive to work English into something resembling classical Greek or Latin, as demonstrated in A.E. Housman's parody of a French tragedy.

Twentieth-century western civilization reflects an improved attitude. Such an improvement is attended by an increased interest in theory, by an objective analysis of the subject. The theory and definition of translation become inseparable from the understanding of language. Ferdinand de Saussure's discoveries bring important knowledge to the field of linguistics. However, it is ideas like those of B.L. Whorf that mitigate against the continuance of metaphrase and stylistic transference. Language, Whorf contends, is the cosmology of a linguistic group, the means by which men parcel and divide reality. It defines existence. Therefore, the system of signs and meanings used by one group does not necessarily correspond to that of another. No two systems can be exactly equivalent, even if two groups are as close as possible on the plane of communication. The experience of life remains defined or transposed in the language of a group. Groups,





tribes, nations, or whatever, have language as their receptacle of experience:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

In short, what Sapir reveals for us is the relativity of languages, relative because they are the subjective interpretation of reality by certain groups. The old notion of absolute and objective existence gives way under Whorf's theories. The new theory builds, however, on the old. Perhaps absolute existence is a worn ideal, but the universality of experience provides for a certain amount of intelligibility between languages. Thus, there is loss of meaning in translation, an inevitable loss, but there is still transference of meaning. If each language represents a subjective vision, there remains a collective one accessible to those who discover the ways of making equivalences of meaning.

There are two major hypotheses made by Whorf: all higher levels of thinking (beyond mere identification) are



dependent on language; the structure of one's language influences one's understanding of the immediate universe.<sup>15</sup> To confirm the first, one need only understand that Greek cosmology is an extension of Greek grammar. The structures of Aristotle's logic are those of his language. We cannot reprove an African if he feels Aristotle is illogical. Genders in language have import in the folk mythology of different groups. In one language the sun may be masculine, in another feminine. This difference provokes a whole range of differences and attitudes concerning the sun mythologies of each group. We still use the terms "sunrise" and "sunset," a use of "Ptolemaic imagery without implying a rejection of Copernican doctrine."<sup>16</sup> The days of the week may differ in gender from group to group, thereby altering the ritual of each day according to culture. Whorf himself chose to study two languages as disparate as Hopi and English. His preference for Hopi as a language system was based on his observations that it is more efficient, logical, compact and concise than English. Whorf as a scientist (chemical engineer) could easily be charmed by such a rational system. However, he ignores his own idea of relativity and fails to give other than scientific explanations for complexity and confusion in some languages. This is a tentative criticism based on the selected reading of his essays, but a criticism attempting to show how languages are also conditioned by the degree



of progress within their particular communities. When a society evolves to a point and not beyond, its system of communication reaches its fullest potential. A language such as English has not yet stopped evolving; its development has been both helped and hindered by its readiness to assimilate new vocabulary, new concepts and new sounds. Thus, if Hopi does not separate time and space into two concepts, it is more efficient, in this one sense, and less complex. English, no doubt, is more complex; however, even the few speakers of Hopi must adapt the language to new demands:

All cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language. Whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loanwords or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions. Thus in the newborn literary language of the Northeast Siberian Chukchees, "screw" is rendered as "rotating nail," "steel" as "hard iron," "tin" as "thin iron," "chalk" as "writing soap," "watch" as "hammering heart."<sup>17</sup>

We observe, therefore, that the naming of things is the all important linguistic function. To name a thing is to possess it. If experience of reality must perforce be widened, then the function of naming new reality must also be extended to invent appropriate forms to hold it.

The advances in the theory of language and linguistics do not radically modify the theories of literary translation. All the traditional concerns about meaning and style are re-articulated, but in the light of new discoveries. Transferring





literature from its original language to a second precludes simple literal displacement. On the other hand, it does give rise to other problems, such as paraphrase, adaptation and expansion. While the process of changing the language of an original involves the proper equivalence of meaning and linguistic expression, the passage from the original style to the "new" style can be rigorous for the translator. Inherent in the notion of style is meaning, so that form and content cannot be dissociated in a manner that would detract from the quality of the translation. Thus, the "Art of translation" phrases a concern for the aesthetics associated with any literary activity. Benedetto Croce, voicing a concern for the integrity of art works, demonstrates in his Estetica the impossibility of transferring the organic unity of Beauty from its original form to another. His argument is based on the indivisibility of expression into modes or degrees. Since the aesthetic form is an individual unity, it is irreducible. Literary creation is the synthesis of impression and linguistic expression, and thus, artistic expression can function only as this synthesis. Though content, or impression may vary, its expression or formulation into words must be unified. Thus, the impossibility of translations, of reducing the aesthetic form:

Corollario di ciò è l'impossibilità delle traduzioni, in quanto abbiano la pretesa di compiere il travasamento di un'espressione in un'altra,





come di un liquido da un vaso in un altro di diversa forma. Si può elaborare logicamente ciò che prima era stato elaborato in forma estetica, ma non ridurre ciò che ha avuto già la sua forma estetica ad altra forma anche estetica. Ogni traduzione, infatti, o sminuisce e guasta, ovvero crea una nuova espressione, rimettendo la prima nel crogiuolo e mescolandola con le impressioni personali di colui che se chiama traduttore. Nel primo caso l'espressione resta sempre una, quella dell'originale, essendo l'altra più o meno deficiente, cioè non propriamente espressione: nell'altro, saranno, sì, due, ma di due contenuti diversi. "Brutte fedeli o belle infedeli"; questo detto proverbiale coglie bene il dilemma, che ogni traduttore si trova innanzi. Le traduzioni inestetiche, come quelle letterali o parafrastiche, sono poi da considerare semplici commenti degli originali.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Croce's argument is the indestructibility of the original form, and the diminished quality of the copy due to its loss of aesthetic synthesis. Though Croce pursues his argumentation through the categories of Rhetoric, his belief in the impene- trability of a completed form in effect re-states the theories of language discussed earlier, in different terms. On the other hand, observation makes him arrive at conclusions different than those just discussed.

It must be made clear that Croce in his aesthetics for the first time is doing something contrary to traditional positivist methods of scholarship: equating the problems of the aesthetic with those of the linguistic. The philosophy of art and the philosophy of language are the same. The aesthetic is the union of impression and expression. The two cannot be



separated. Therefore, language is part of the unity of literature. Language is the medium, the form and the content. Such a theory of art allows for resemblances of expressions, of artistic expression. Similarities when observed allow for classification and distinction within each art. Romantic poets display a "family likeness" caused by historical and cultural conditions. Thus, Croce arrives at the relative possibility of translation:

E in siffatte somiglianze si fonda la possibilità relativa delle traduzioni: non in quanto riproduzioni (che sarebbe vano tentare) delle medesime espressioni originali, ma in quanto produzioni di espressioni somiglianti e più o meno prossime a quelle. La traduzione, che si dice buona, è un'approssimazione, che ha valore originale d'opera d'arte e può stare da sé.<sup>19</sup>

In Croce's sense, translation is definitely an activity of expression as is original creation. Similarity between an original and a translation is not similarity of equivalence of effect, but similarity of expression. When the process of translating imposes a direction of its own surpassing the bare intention of doing justice to the original, the new aesthetic expression arrived at may stand on its own literary merit. Croce's optimism is also shared by Giovanni Gentile:

Ma che cosa è il tradurre, non in astratto ma in concreto, quando c'è chi traduce e quando si badi a quel che egli fa, se non un'interpretazione, in cui da una lingua si passa ad un'altra perchè sono entrambe note al traduttore, e cioè il traduttore le ha messe in rapporto nel suo spirito, e può



passare dall'una all'altra, come da una parte all'altra della stessa lingua: di quell'unica lingua, che per lui veramente ci sia: la quale non è nè l'una nè l'altra, ma l'insieme delle due nella loro relazione od unità? Chi traduce comincia a pensare in un modo, al quale non si arresta; ma lo trasforma, continuando a svolgere, a chiarificare, a rendere a sè sempre più intimo e soggettivo quello che ha cominciato a pensare: e in questo passaggio da un momento all'altro del suo proprio pensiero, nella sua unica lingua, ha luogo quello che, empiricamente considerando, si dice tradurre, come un passare da una lingua ad un'altra. E non avviene forse il medesimo quando leggiamo ciò che è scritto nella nostra stessa lingua, da altri o da noi medesimi?<sup>20</sup>

Translating, therefore, proceeds from the spirit, not from the bifurcation of ability, but from the oneness of creation.

What can be described as the "aesthetics of translation," seems to be directed towards a clearer theory and definition of the process itself. The impulse behind the rendition of literary works from language to language, is creative and not mimetic. Renato Poggioli contends that translation goes beyond mere study of formal exercise and attempts to give a verbal composition a changed body and a novel animus:

That translation is an interpretive art is a self-evident truth. Yet it is a paradox peculiar to the translator that he is the only interpretive artist working in a medium which is both identical with, and different from, that of the original he sets out to render in his own terms. Except for him, all artistic interpreters may be said to belong to one of the following categories. The first is that of the performing artist, who, whether he is an actor, singer, or instrumentalist, employs as his own vehicle the expressive material forming the aesthetic substance of the original work he is interpreting. The second is made up of all those





artists I would like to call decorative, in the figurative sense of that epithet, and is exemplified by the scene designer, by the composer writing music to accompany a play or a ballet, by the mime or dancer reshaping words and tunes into facial gestures, bodily acts, and choreographic figures. Obviously the mime and dancer who manipulate the pure stuff of their art, and treat their literary script or musical score as servants rather than as masters, are not interpreters but creators in their own right. Otherwise, the artists of the decorative class are equivalents of the book illustrator, who is their archetype, and who like them, uses a medium other than that which is specific to the work he is supposed to decorate or illustrate.<sup>21</sup>

The first class of artists are "interpreters," while the second are "translators." The translator as we know him, represents a class by himself. He works in a dual mode, following both methods at once.<sup>22</sup> In the abstract, we can see that he moulds the aesthetic material of his model, language; but he elaborates a linguistic material foreign to the text he is translating.

The objections to such a definition immediately present themselves. Is the translator a frustrated creator? Does he strive for self-expression of his own? Does he re-state ideas analagous to his own? Is it a question of old wine being poured into new bottles? Poggioli insists that often the bottles are similar (like Croce's expressions), and that the translator sometimes adds new wine. Does the translator supply form for a content he lacks? Other times he may choose form instead of content, a play rather than a poem because the





former is more interesting as a vehicle of expression. However, translation is as much a craft as it is an illumination of an original:

At any rate what moves the genuine translator is not a mimetic urge, but an elective affinity: the attraction of a content so appealing that he can identify it with a content of his own, thus enabling him to control the latter through a form which, though not inborn, is at least congenial to it.<sup>22</sup>

The translator adds technical ability to his sympathies for the text he translates. The identification with content mitigates against artless impersonation, because a synthesis of judgment must prevail for the translator. This synthesis is one of craft and content. Transference thereby transcends metaphor.

The needs of the translator, whether these be artistic or otherwise, are outweighed by the possibilities open for him. Such possibilities can be truthfully called the hazards of the profession. Literary translation often degenerates into mistranslation, helped on its way by temptations to paraphrase, adapt or expand. Paraphrase frequently renders meaning in an abridged form. Often the story will dominate the translator's fancy, causing him to adapt plot to his own ends. Expansion is a means used to add to and enlarge the incidents in the original text. It is often true that expansion constitutes a legitimate procedure if used as a tool to clarify obscurities where necessary. It is a legitimate but limited tool, not a complete procedure for rendering the full text. Obscurities can often be clarified by preciseness of equivalence.



To avoid mistranslation and other pitfalls, a clear understanding of the text must be arrived at. In the treatment of older or ancient texts, the text itself must sometimes be established as authentically as possible. The business of substituting languages begins only after these necessary preliminaries. Substitution is the act of replacing one logical sign or unit of expression by another. Logical, and not literal equivalence, means a sign or expression carries with it lexical and other meanings that pertain to it and that are assigned by condition (cultural), syntax, situation (story), or context (textual). Granted that form and content are inseparable, a translator cannot provide an exact substitution for original form. The same meaning will be transferred to the target language, but it will have its own form, a logical substitution which will attempt to convey the flavour of the original. This is the best possible translation. However, very often meaning or content is inordinately sacrificed to the translator's desire to transfer form as exactly as possible. What we observe is a double process: the translation of meaning first, then a re-translation of the meaning into its final form. Form is constructed to the meaning so that the final text must display a concert of form and content just as the original does, which in most cases can suggest what the final product should be like in the target language.<sup>24</sup> Such pains-



taking by the translator, such study of form and meaning produces beneficial results in the end. The final form of "Lupus in fabula" will be proverbial and relevant in a target language such as English. The logical solution is, "Speak of the devil, and he appears."

T.H. Savory, attempting to shed light on the subject, distinguishes four kinds of translation:<sup>25</sup>

1. purely informative: changes are structural not semantic; for example, "No Smoking" = "Défense à [sic] fumer";
2. generally adequate translation: no literary or linguistic preoccupations--matter more than manner is rendered;
3. aesthetically difficult translation: literature where the original demands manner as well as matter be rendered;
4. scientific and technical translation: vocabulary problems.

The first two categories present no problems for the translator, except for decisions of paraphrase and abridgement in the second. The major concern here is to remove the barrier between two languages. It must be understood, however, that meaning is translated in these first two categories, as it is in the other two, and that "meaning" does not refer to metaphrase or word for word rendition. It is rather a unit found in a phrase or sentence as it relates to all the parts of the text. To illustrate, one need only remember our Latin proverb. "Meaning," in contradistinction to metaphrase, is transference, as Savory himself





demonstrates using the German, "Mit Wölfen muss mann heulen."<sup>26</sup> Translated literally it becomes, "With or among wolves, one must howl with the pack"; but its true meaning is rendered by, "When in Rome, do as Rome does." The last two categories named by Savory, give rise to problems of meaning and method or style.

Savory's next step is to pose the basic questions the translator needs to ask himself when approaching a text: what does the author say? what does he mean? and how does he say it?<sup>27</sup> In fewer words, the translator proceeds through the word, the sentence, the context: three steps corresponding to Savory's three questions.

Obviously, such a deep involvement in a second language can weaken the translator's use of the target language, presumably his native tongue. The journey through word, sentence, and context requires a prolonged immersion in the syntax of the source language, and may show up as a seemingly too literal translation. Knowledge of the source language must be critical, and that of the target language practical,<sup>28</sup> if such a problem is to be overcome. In addition, the translator must have some affinity with the original; it must strike a response in him; it must be such that he is willing to become surrogate author. Such complication of matters proves translation is not a mechanical process.





No doubt the principles of translation are difficult to formulate. Should verbal accuracy be sacrificed for aesthetic effect, as many nineteenth-century translators espoused? The effect of a translation cannot be predetermined, the final effect being that which the original had on the translator. The doctrine of effect, original effect, is faulty because it ignores the essence of language as discussed earlier. Traditionally, effect over meaning and vice versa has been a constant and alternating battle. In order of appearance, the combatants are: first, literal translation; second, rendition according to ideas and sense; third, style and manner rendered as in the original. Now that such a review has passed, it would be extremely pertinent to ask the question, why translate? The answer is self-evident in the first two cases: to communicate. But in the third, the need for communication is superseded by purely aesthetical and intellectual concerns. Knowledge of the original is prerequisite for any reader of "beautiful" translations. Such renditions as these are for the scholar. None of these three cases, however, necessarily constitutes a critical translation. Indifferent rendering of the original, as may happen in the second instance, may satisfy the general reader, but it remains untrue to the original. The other two, which are extremes, are equally untrue because they overstress one or more limited aspects of the primary text.



Thus, it must be repeated, the principles of translation are difficult to formulate. Savory sums the problem up by listing the various and opposing "rules" for translating:

To make plain the nature of the instruction which would-be translators have received, a convenient method is to state them shortly in contrasting pairs, as follows:

1. A translation must give the words of the original.
2. A translation must give the ideas of the original.
3. A translation should read like an original work.
4. A translation should read like a translation.
5. A translation should reflect the style of the original.
6. A translation should possess the style of the translator.
7. A translation should read as a contemporary of the original.
8. A translation should read as a contemporary of the translator.
9. A translation may add to or omit from the original.
10. A translation may never add to or omit from the original.
11. A translation of verse should be in prose.
12. A translation of verse should be in verse.<sup>28</sup>

Here the conflict between faithfulness and re-creation is clearly stated. Faithfulness can be conveyed literally or stylistically. Re-creation as a process involves the two, moderated by the requirements of the target language. That is not to say that re-creation is free translation. On the contrary, free, as literal, translation is an extreme. Re-creation,



then, is to be defined as logical and proper equivalence. Such equivalence is governed by the total systems of the languages involved. One cannot render "quatre-vingts" as "four-twenties," but must make it "eighty." It is the system of the languages involved that imposes on the translator the limits of his translation. A foreign style cannot be transferred. It can be imitated, but whether or not the imitation is effective is another problem.

To reflect a foreign style presents problems not only for the translator, but for the reader also. Such problems preclude the possibility of "perfect" and "exact" translation. However, inasmuch as style reflects an author's personality, culture, education and time in history, it remains an integral part of an original text. Should it be reproduced then, or transposed into more contemporary style? Savory, and most of the other critics consulted, give the impression that style can be reproduced in translation. They ignore, however, that style is the peculiar way with words characteristic of a specific author. For them style is rather, choice of words, and not otherwise. Therefore, to render an original whose choice of words is anachronistic in an equally anachronistic manner, limits the translation to a reduced audience, namely one familiar with the anachronisms. On the other hand, conceding that style is one's way with words, it must be realized that this way is un-





translatable, untransferable into another language. The system of the target language almost always forbids it. The style of an original cannot, therefore, be reproduced; but it can be re-constructed or re-made into the target language. The peculiarities of culture and period, as they are evidenced in the original diction, can be transmitted through sense. Tone and mood are transferred, but not personal style.

For Savory and others, the problem of translating an author's method is a restricted one. It restricts itself to the question of who reads translation. There are four kinds of readers, says Savory, for whom translations are intended.<sup>29</sup> Here are the four in a modified list: the general reader ignorant of the original language and even the original work, who reads out of curiosity, not knowing he reads a translation; the student learning the language of the original who uses the translation as a crib; the reader aware he reads a translation, who possibly has had some contact with the source language, but needs the translation to make up for an ability that is lacking; the scholar-critic, interested in the intellectual exercise of translation. Considering such readers, one can conclude that there are different purposes for translation. The general reader will not, in all probability, learn the source language; on the other hand, the scholar and student will. Shall the ordinary reader be deprived of good translations because he lacks certain





critical abilities? In principle, no translation should suffer mistreatment by indifferent and disinterested translators. All translations, though destined for different readers, need to maintain a relatively high quality, even if they are primarily intended to be transpositions of ideas from an original. Ultimately, a translation should be as organic in structure as any good original, for great literature is universally accessible to all readers, though not in the same degree. Even the scholar whose knowledge includes three or four languages other than his own, must have access to literature via translation because reading originals in a third, fourth or fifth language may very well be like reading a primitive translation. One gets the content, but nothing else. A superlative translation, meanwhile, can provide better insight into the qualities of the original. The translator therefore, should produce for every kind of reader.

Literary classics of antiquity are accessible to most readers through translation. The same is true for modern works. However, problems of a different nature develop when dealing with modern languages. For the most part, as concerns Western civilization, these languages share common cultural roots. This is an obvious advantage in some ways. But translation is hindered or helped by how far apart or how close the source and target languages are in their cognate forms:



[...] whereas in French a word which resembles an English word seldom, if ever, has the same meaning, in German it is, in fact, more usually the same word. The phenomenon of "deceptive resemblance" is rare between the English and the German languages; and this is the first reason for the smaller risk of errors in translation.<sup>31</sup>

Such a general statement bears scrutiny in actual practice, although it is not altogether incorrect to suggest there are general differences in the characters of languages that make them more or less suitable for translating. The degree of suitability engenders the question of perfection or degree of perfection:

A perfect translation, it has been said, conveys the spirit of the original author by giving us the words that he would have used had his language been that into which his writings are about to be translated. The finding of these words, it may be added, must take into account the author's style, which depends on his personality as well as the time and the special circumstances in which he wrote.<sup>32</sup>

The first sentence of the above quotation can be contested for its rather idealistic assertion. On the other hand, it is clear the translator must strive for this kind of perfection, and his work must be as effortless in its final form as it seems to be in its original—effortless, not in the sense of belying obscurity, but in linguistic facility: the translation must be native to the target language.

In effect, the nature of language itself, specifically the literary use of language, obstructs this effortless-



As a creative tool, language is not always emotive or informative, but very often symbolic, heuristic or hermetic so that prose may present problems of transference usually associated with poetry translation. The mot juste in these cases represents more than just logical equivalence; it must capture imagery, rhythm, nuance, and the function it has in the source language. In final form, the translation may be a reduced or expanded version of the original in its attempt to capture it. A certain amount of paraphrase or expansion is inevitable, but such should not be excessive when neither the source nor the target language warrant it. When excessive paraphrase or expansion does occur, does the final product merit being called a translation:

Thus arises the question, When is a translation not a translation? and the answer is, When it is a new version or a new rendering; and the reason for the question is that the composer of any such paraphrase may not have read the original nor even have been able to do so.<sup>33</sup>

This is not a facetious statement. Many translators are so ignorant of the source language that they ignore the original text and proceed from a vague notion of its content. Other translators use the original as a vehicle for their own ideas, distorting its form, often making their rendition ludicrous:

[...] there are [...] instances in which the translator is fully aware of what he is doing. When the German version of the American war play, What Price Glory? (German title: Rivalen), [...] was presented in Berlin in 1929, it did not [...] preserve the





American point of view. Instead, it had become a play which used the [original] plot as a vehicle for Carl Zuckmayer's own feelings against militarism, to express his ideas of the "Etappe," to give his conception of the experiences in the front lines, and to portray French and Jewish characters according to his own whims. Zuckmayer did the [American] playwrights a disservice by introducing his own ideas into the American war play.<sup>34</sup>

The final effect is heightened by lack of translating ability:

[...] Zuckmayer obviously shows ignorance of an American colloquialism when he renders the sentence, "parks his dogs in Flagg's bed" literally as "lässt seine Hunde in Flaggs Bett liegen" instead of realizing that "dogs" is slang for "feet." In this case, the result is amusing, but a mistranslation can have rather serious consequences.<sup>35</sup>

After all of the preceding exposition, can we give translation a suitable definition? The following terms come to mind: transference, substitution, equivalence, interpretation, metaphor, re-creation. Different critics provide us with different definitions; but in essence, these are similar. Eugene Nida gives us the following:

Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style.<sup>36</sup>

Any definition of our subject depends on recognizing the lack of any absolute correspondence between languages, but will show the necessity of finding equivalence as close as possible. As Nida implied, equivalence of both meaning and style cannot always be retained; however, the purpose intended for the transla-





tion will dictate which should dominate. In general, one always assumes that meaning dominates, as it is more easily transferable than style.

From this definition there is no difficulty in understanding the implications of Leonard Forster's solution:

I want to consider translation as the transference of the content of a text from one language into another, bearing in mind that we cannot always dissociate the content from the form. If communication can be regarded for the time being as the use of those signs and symbols by which men influence one another, it might perhaps be best to consider translation as a conversion of symbols rather than a transference of meaning.<sup>37</sup>

The conversion of symbols requires a knowledge of the symbol. Comprehension follows from knowing the symbol's context and its relationship in the whole system of the language. The immediate context and the general context (language) must be clear in order to avoid misunderstanding full meaning. This procedure avoids ambiguity and indicates the relative importance of a symbol's meaning. Having reached as complete an understanding as possible of the words and their context, the next step to be taken is the determination of the translation's purpose. As discussed earlier, the purpose relates to the kind of reader it will reach. Purpose can also be considered differently:

The first question at this point is: What is the purpose of the text in the original language? What means does the author employ to realize this purpose? The next question is: can I as a translator use the same means within the framework of my own language? If not, which can I use?<sup>38</sup>



Within its confines, the original work will have its own direction: is it informative, emotive, symbolic, or what? This must be transmitted in the target language. Transferring content is more difficult in proportion to the difficulty of the original's purpose. The actual conversion of symbols must be effected within the limits of that purpose, and be dictated by their respective systems. The systems themselves are conditioned geographically, culturally and historically. Translation must be transparent enough to allow us a view of the original work of art. Invariably, the process of translating colours this transparency, but the translator, if faithful to his task, will strive for a perfection of view rather than opaqueness.

Specifically, what are the difficulties encountered in translating from French into English? Many critics concur on what they believe to be the most frequent problems in this kind of translation, and all agree on the deceptiveness of the faux-amis. Others have differing opinions on the relative difficulties of transferring the one into the other. How close or how far apart are these two languages---this is the main point of contention. Historically, there is a similarity between French and English; even in their present cultural positions they resemble each other. Linguistically, however, they differ in their respective modes of constructing reality, although there are a great many concurrences on the lexical level.



From a literary standpoint, the two languages have influenced one another, but have produced works of varied quality. How, therefore, does the translator go about changing a French original into an English translation?

His task is twofold: first he must translate, that is to say communicate the exact meaning of his French text, and secondly he has to give his English reader some impression of the flavour of that text, for no literary work is tasteless, like a glass of distilled water; it has its peculiar aroma, or consistency or texture, which the translator must try to transmit. I deliberately put these two aspects of literary translation in that order, exact meaning first and flavour second, so as to rule out once and for all the so-called translation that in its enthusiasm for points of style modifies the sense of the original. Any attempt at translation which deviates from meaning is, I submit, not a translation but a paraphrase. With this in mind I venture to define style as any device of literary expression having as object to communicate to the reader some emotional experience, or having as result to reveal that the work is that of an individual. Style, then, for our purposes, means peculiarities of form either having some emotional effect upon the reader (I avoid the word aesthetic, for all art is emotion, and without emotion no art) or betraying the fingerprints of the author.<sup>39</sup>

Tancock's statement presupposes a method for rendering content, to which must be added a feeling of flavour or style. As style is heightened or made more effective, the content becomes more charged and intense, thereby increasing the need for unity of form and content in translation. If the syntax of linguistic elements in the original forms part of the full meaning, this order must be rendered logically in the target language, since it is an essential component of meaning. It must be remembered that meaning issues from the union of form and substance.







Another critic, D.S. Carne-Ross, attempts further to refine the definition of translation by introducing another term, transposition, to stand in contradistinction to what is mere metaphrase and pure translation:

Transposition, in the sense I choose to give it, occurs when the language of the matter to be translated stands close enough to the language of the translator—in age, idiom, cultural habits and so on—for him to be able to follow the letter with a fair hope of keeping faith with the spirit. Turning a modern French novel into English is thus mainly a matter of transposition. Poetry is more difficult, because its verbal organisation is usually more concentrated and more personal; nonetheless a good deal of modern verse can usefully be transposed.<sup>40</sup>

The above statement demonstrates either a superb idealism or an ignorance of the facts. To propose a theory of transposition as an intermediate generic activity is in itself a difficult proposition. To prop it up with a somewhat whimsical assertion that languages related historically and culturally require hardly any effort in their exchange is to ignore the basic nature of language and its relationship to reality. To cite modern English and French as examples for transposition does an injustice to them. Carne-Ross would have been on safer grounds quoting two Slavic tongues such as Ukrainian and Russian as examples to illustrate his theory. René Etiemble's Parlez-vous franglais? notwithstanding, English and French demonstrate an incompatibility that makes them extremely difficult to translate with acuity:



The problem is this: does not the transforming of a written work from one language to another utterly alter its character? And, in performing this metamorphosis, does not the translator commit, if not a sacrilege, at least an offense against art and spirit? These questions [...] become crucial as soon as poetry is at stake. The higher we go in the literary hierarchy, the more difficult it is to separate a work from its own original expression. [...]

Naturally, the drama [of translation] is less intense when the two languages bear a close kinship. Shakespeare found his second best home in Germany, and Pushkin is likely to be less betrayed by Polish than by Chinese. When the roots are the same, when the rules are sister, when both tongues have in common a certain syntax, climate and resonance, the translator is able to convey not only the meaning but the tone; the atmosphere; to reproduce not only the skeleton, but the flesh. [...] However, my concern is not with facilities, but rather the reverse, in comparing the two most incomparable, two most incompatible tongues of the Western world: English and French.

[...] But the differences I am referring to are less a question of grammar and vocabulary than a question of spirit, spirits which ten centuries of literature have finally led to extreme opposites.<sup>41</sup>

Jean Paris comes closer to the truth than does Carne-Ross regarding the nature of French-English translation.

Moreover, Carne-Ross does not indicate how transposition and translation differ as regards their final products. Translation occurs, he maintains, when the original is further removed in time from the target language used by the translator. At its best, translation is born much like literary creation. The experience of a foreign text, states Carne-Ross, provides an inspiration or need to re-formulate it in another language:



True translation is much more a commentary on the original than a substitute for it. Like criticism, to which it is closely allied, its role is interpretative. Every age has to work out its own relations to the creative achievements of the past, and the task of the translator, like that of the critic, is to define those works of other times and places which are most living and reveal those aspects of them which we most need today.

Only when translation is seen in this way, as essentially an instrument of criticism, is it going to be allowed the liberty it needs. Where it is seen as a substitute for the original, the stress is likely to fall on literal accuracy. If we are looking for a faithful account of the letter of the original, we should use a crib not a translation. [...] The accuracy of translation is of a very different kind. A great deal of local distortion, of amplification and even excision, may be necessary if the translator is to follow the curve of his original faithfully.<sup>42</sup>

One cannot quarrel with the observations made in the first paragraph of the above quotation; however, the second half deserves some attention. Too many subtle distinctions are required by the differences between translation and transposition. To say one is re-creation and the other displacement of content, forces no distinction between simple transference of content and transformation of an original into a valuable "second." When a rendition of an original masterwork is needed, the literary qualities of both original and translation should be discernible in the end. There is no reason why a contemporary reader of Proust, reading no French, cannot be edified by a superlative English text. Such a text should be critical in its use of language, penetrating and revealing for the reader; all those





qualities Carne-Ross would save for his "translations." To close this argument, S.P. Bovie provides a simple insight:

The existence of translations being granted, translation itself serves readers somewhat the way criticism does, by putting art into use. Through either medium something besides immediate cognition is gained. The original is reread, examined under a different light, subjected to interpretation. By being translated it undergoes experiences similar to those it meets by being criticized.<sup>43</sup>

An original is adapted to new purposes when it is put into use. Use is determined by factors, such as taste which places a premium on works to be translated. The reader of a translation undergoes the same critical processes, more or less, as does the reader of the original; that is to say, he extracts as much or as little as he wishes from his reading experience.

Why must it be maintained that French-English translation remains always difficult? The most obvious reason is the nature of the languages themselves. Insisting on the inherent differences between languages intimates the impossibility of transferring one into the other. Valery Larbaud contends that the would-be translator or whoever feels the task of translation is hopeless, should remain a reader and hold his peace if language is so frightful to him.<sup>44</sup> When translation is attempted, there can be no illusions about the final result. The rhetoric of Exactness, Faithfulness and Intention apply to the translator's faith rather than to his product:





It seems to me that we may compare the work of a translator with that of an artist who is asked to create an exact replica of a marble statue, but who cannot secure any marble. He may find some other stone or some wood, or he may have to model in clay or work in bronze, or he may have to use a brush or a pencil and a sheet of paper. Whatever his material, if he is a good craftsman, his work may be good or even great; it may indeed surpass the original, but it will never be what he set out to produce, an exact replica of the original.<sup>45</sup>

And Jean Paris concurs with this idea:

The most current error which has impaired the spirit of translation is the belief that one must necessarily imitate the written text. I am not trying to encourage infidelity, but to determine at which level and for what element fidelity must be intransigent. Since French and English are so obviously antagonistic, I propose that it is futile to hope to obtain literal accuracy without betraying the music, or to reproduce the music without altering the meaning.<sup>46</sup>

One is inclined to agree with Jean Paris about the nature of English and French when being translated. In the final analysis, what he attempts to point out is that art is less invention than discovery, and that the translator creates the original in the target language. He rediscovers it when his translation is completed. According to Paris, the translator works from some transcendental model of the original that he has constructed for himself. Undoubtedly, this is idealistic, in the sense that it restricts the "author" to a model which supposedly reconstructs the original inspiration. Thus, art is discovery, or recovery or the original process of invention. However, Paris does make this one observation that sums up very well:



If I dared to phrase it in family terms, I would say a successful translation should rather be the brother than the son of the original, for both should proceed from the same transcendental Idea which is the real but invisible father of the work. And finally, a book is but the endless series of its own metamorphoses, and through its various epiphanies tends to become universal, to coincide with its archetype, as a mathematical series approaches the infinite without ever reaching it, or as a hero, like Don Juan or Faust, progresses from one author toward his ideal image.<sup>47</sup>

William Arrowsmith says much the same, but in a different way:

We translate, for instance, into the literary "conventions" of our own age, and although these conventions are not absolute--since the central convention allows the translator a certain strangeness, an oddness playing now and then over the language or erupting in the unassimilable artifacts of a culture not our own--they are something we disregard at our peril. And there are all the various conventions of culture too, both of the language from which we translate and our own; and these compose a necessity whose boundaries must be discovered or explored, unless we give up translation for simple "adaptation."<sup>48</sup>

Translation travels through time, the journey marked by the conventions of the day. For the comparatist this journey provides a wealth of information for the study of literary history and criticism, or motifs, themes, sources and influences.

What should translation achieve after all investigation and interpretation and probing are over and done with? After the reader has finished, what lingering effects should there be for the art or science of translation? It is often said that masterworks of foreign and ancient literatures are assimilated into different cultures by a process of "naturalization" via



translation. What does this process ultimately do for the language and literature of any particular culture:

In its truest role translation does not consist solely in reducing all foreign works to the limitations of, say, English, but equally in reshaping and enlarging English to reach meanings which it has not yet had to grapple with. As much as the work is translated into English, English should be translated to and around the work.<sup>49</sup>

The central convention of strangeness suggested earlier by Professor Arrowsmith need not exist in its purest sense. That is to say, the language of a translation need not appear foreign to the system it belongs to and to native readers. What will be strange, will be the whole thing itself, the curious expression of meaning borrowed from another language, another culture, perhaps even another time. No one element will be "strange" per se, but all the elements together will retain a certain peculiarity. The naturalized literary immigrant will always bring his baggage along. What is unpacked remains to be seen when the translator has finished the job.<sup>50</sup>

### Linguistics and Translation

The material for this section must be selected carefully and arranged in such a way as to avoid too much an imbroglia in the many and varied theories of language and linguistics. The subject itself, linguistics and translation, is vast enough to fill more than one volume of text. In fact, Georges







Mounin has begun the task in his book, Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction (Paris, 1967). This study follows his first work on the theory of translation, Les belles infidèles (Paris, 1955), and deals with the theoretical arguments against translation posed by the field of linguistics. However, his study covers too large an area to be considered at length here.

On the other hand, there are a few shorter studies to be selected from various others on the linguistic aspects of translation. Chief among these are two by Roman Jakobson,<sup>51</sup> clearly pointing out that translation is possible in spite of theoretical arguments against it; such as might be suggested by the theories of Whorf and others. Mounin notes these others to be Bloomfield, Sapir, and Martinet, to name just a few.<sup>52</sup>

While much has been said about the nature of language and its qualities of being closed, most critics either deliberately refrain from or ignore defining literature itself. Since literary translation is being considered in this Introduction, a proper definition of literature must be given following the discussion of language and its translatability. The Whorfian theory has been mentioned earlier above; Mounin underlines the fact that it is commonly accepted by all schools that each language names and divides reality according to its own way and according to its own purpose.<sup>53</sup> A universal definition of literature will point out why it can be transposed from language



to language. If done linguistically, such a definition will disprove the inaccessibility of language systems as suggested by scholars like Whorf and Bloomfield. No theory or definition of literature can be posited on the idea of inaccessibility.

Similarly, no theory or definition of literature can be posited on the idea of differences in non-literary and literary (poetic) language. Obviously, language is one thing in itself. However, it can be used differently by different users. Thus, poets will use it poetically; they do not utilize a level or kind of language distinctive in and of itself. The particular use of language makes it distinctive as one thing or another. Tentatively, one can say that literature is the literary or poetic use of language.

Jakobson in "Linguistics and Poetics" proves this point by distinguishing between the factors (components) of language and the functions (uses) of language. In literature, it is as though the referential function of language is held in abeyance. This becomes clear, for example, when reading a poem about the Sea, where the sea can only exist conceptually or universally as a sign (word). This is not to say that the non-literary use of language may not do the same. On the contrary, for Jakobson the poetic function, like all the functions of language, is simultaneously present for use at any time with the others. It must be conceded, however, that generally the



non-literary use of language avails itself of its referential function over all else.<sup>54</sup> The poetic function is a linguistic function, representing one of the possible uses of language. In poetry (literature) where the referential function is suspended, the orientation towards the Message as such, focus on it for its own sake, constitutes the Poetic function:

Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry.<sup>55</sup>

However, Jakobson further refines this idea into a precise but not obscure definition; but it remains difficult for those not familiar with the whole of his argumentation:

What is the empirical linguistic criterion of the poetic function? In particular, what is the indispensable feature inherent in any piece of poetry? To answer this question we must recall the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour, selection and combination. If "child" is the topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs--sleeps, dozes, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy, while the combination, the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. THE POETIC FUNCTION PROJECTS THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUIVALENCE FROM THE AXIS OF SELECTION INTO THE AXIS OF COMBINATION. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence.<sup>56</sup>





To understand this definition, it is important to grasp the significance of factors and functions of language and what happens in the literary use of language:

The supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous. The double-sensed message finds correspondence in a split addresser, in a split addressee, and besides in a split reference, as it is cogently exposed in the preambles to fairy tales of various peoples, for instance, in the usual exordium of the Majorca story-tellers: "Aixo era y no era" (It was and it was not).<sup>57</sup>

A functional description of literature stated in linguistic terms is essential for undertaking and understanding translation. If literary translation takes the form of equivalence of textual material, some basic idea about that material's nature must be arrived at. The translation of a text must do the same in the target language as the original does in the source language. That is to say, to remain literature in the target language, it must fulfil the poetic function, thereby making the referential function properly ambiguous. Thus, there can be no simple rendering of content in a translation aspiring to a literary stature on its own. To render only content is not to focus on the message for its own sake. This does comply with the necessities of Jakobson's definition. To render content without a similar rendition of form (combination), only partially fulfils the principle of equivalence; the literary use of the target language therefore, is never wholly achieved.





In the second paper by Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," three kinds of possible translation are noted:<sup>58</sup>

1. Intralingual translation, or rewording. This is the interpretation of one set of verbal signs by another set in the same language.
2. Interlingual translation, or translation proper. This is the interpretation of one set of verbal signs by another set in a different language.
3. Intersemiotic translation, or transmutation. This is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems.

In the first case, there is synonymy, circumlocution, paraphrase; but not even synonymy provides exact equivalence. Circumlocution might be more exact but gives rise to expansion of the original code and message. Paraphrase, on the other hand, may reduce or change the original to a markedly different unity of expression. Interlingual translation also suffers from the impossibility of full equivalence, in greater degree than intralingual transference; however, the message can be interpreted. Transposition from one language to another most often substitutes message for message and not code for code. In fact, it is preferable to translate in this fashion. The working out of the message in the target language, once past the stage of mere substitution, must impose its own requirements to make the final product a literary object. The dogma of untranslatability cannot be invoked because any message can be transposed, and any sign



accommodated for. The mandates of the target language will thus render grammatical categories it lacks by lexical means.

Moreover, literature will itself increase the difficulties of translating because of its dominant linguistic function. However, this does not mitigate against translation. But the focusing on words and their order, rather than on objects, has its advantages for the translator:

In its cognitive function, language is minimally dependent on the grammatical pattern because the definition of our experience stands in complementary relation to metalinguistic operations--the cognitive level of language not only admits but directly requires recoding interpretation, i.e., translation. Any assumption of ineffable or untranslatable cognitive data would be a contradiction in terms. But in jest, in dreams, in magic, briefly, in what one would call everyday verbal mythology and in poetry above all, the grammatical categories carry a high semantic import. In these conditions, the question of translation becomes more entangled and controversial.<sup>59</sup>

All qualities of the original that fulfil a semantic function must somehow be transposed. The ordinary literary critic indulges in intralingual translation when offering commentary on a literary piece. The foreign reader avails himself of interlingual translation even when reading a foreign original. The musician, dancer, cinema director or painter will indulge in intersemiotic transposition when attempting to re-create a verbal composition in his own medium. The fact that all this can transpire makes the success of the final product immanent. What poses the greatest difficulty in all cases is the achieve-



ment of the highest degree of successful transposition of  
meaning.<sup>60</sup>

Both of Jakobson's papers reveal a flexibility of thought. Once the literary use of language is defined, it can be maintained that the translation of literature is possible since any language can exploit poetic function. In addition, the one thing Jakobson demonstrates in his thinking is the resiliency allowed by transposition and equivalence. Mounin puts it quite succinctly:

En effet le vrai danger qui guette maintenant cette thèse linguistique solidement établie, selon laquelle notre langue oriente, prédispose, prévient, préfabrique et limite la façon dont nous regardons le monde, c'est que cette thèse soit formulée de manière fixiste. Ce danger, dont Whorf est sans doute le plus illustre victime, guette les linguistes surtout préoccupés d'analyses synchroniques, de linguistique interne, descriptive, formelle--et qui par hypothèse n'envisagent pas le jeu du facteur-temps sur la langue. Alors, cette thèse suggère que non seulement la langue oriente, organise notre vision du monde, mais qu'elle l'immobilise. Accentuant le mouvement trop longtemps inaperçu qui va de la langue au monde, elle oublie le mouvement certain qui va du monde à la langue.<sup>61</sup>

Mounin's observation is particularly acute if one recognizes that language is form above anything else. It has substance inasmuch as there is verbal activity and circumstance involved in its use. These are extralinguistic, residing outside the language. However, they do impinge on the form of language in what has just been called "le mouvement certain qui va du monde à la langue." Translation therefore, is essentially





applied linguistics: it neither describes nor demonstrates;  
rather it does: the theory of translation

[...] is concerned with a certain type of relation between languages and is consequently a branch of Comparative Linguistics. From the point of view of translation theory the distinction between synchronic and diachronic comparison is irrelevant. Translation equivalences may be set up, and translations performed, between any pair of languages or dialects--"related" or "unrelated" and with any kind of spatial, <sup>62</sup> temporal, social or other relationship between them.

Jakobson and Mounin come to similar conclusions. Mounin, after long theoretical discussion, concludes, as does Jakobson, that even though all arguments against the possibility of translating can be distilled into one: a translation is not the original;<sup>63</sup> all arguments for translation can be distilled into one: any sign is transferrable into a sign which presents its message in a different but fully developed way.<sup>64</sup> E.E. Milligan concludes that,

One may well ask whether there really exist any permanent "principles." In the measure that principles are solely generalizations based on experience, it can be maintained that at least some of the principles of translation are known and have a somewhat constant validity. They should never be thought of as immutable but as guiding thoughts which, when applied, give the translator a certain assurance that he is proceeding correctly.<sup>65</sup>

It seems, in the final analysis, translation is made possible by the facts about its medium and by the facts about its practitioners. Though language may seem impenetrable when viewed from the outside, it is fluid enough internally to allow



for its transference. Its fluidity stems from its dialectical nature. Though linguistics often attempts to universalize rules about its nature, language resists any absolutism that tends to staticize its true essence.

#### SOME PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING LE TORRENT

Because of Anne Hébert's difficult style, any English translation of Le Torrent should be as demanding upon the reader as it is in the original. Since form and content are melded together in any literary composition, it is most important that a similar unity be achieved in translation. In addition, the nature of both French and English presents certain problems for the translator not necessarily having to do with an author's personal style.<sup>66</sup> What can be concluded from this is that the translator undertakes both linguistic and literary transposition. The author's way with words as well as his own language join together with those of the translator. Any final result issues from this one complete activity of translating.

To illustrate the problems encountered in translating Anne Hébert's story, there are many examples to be taken from the original and its English rendition. However, a few will suffice. The most common problem in this translation is the correct rendering of faux-amis that result from the closeness



of many French and English words. Of course, those words assimilated into English do not retain their original meanings, and need to be replaced by their proper equivalents. For example, the original in the very first paragraph reads, "J'avais seulement le sentiment de sa terrible grandeur qui me glaçait" (pp. 9-10). Because of the context of the preceding sentences, the first version read, "I felt only her terrible height bearing over me, and it froze me stiff with fear." The translation of terrible by "terrible" is an illustration of a faux-ami, in the sense that the English does not convey the whole import of the original. "Dreadful" or "awful" would be more appropriate and in keeping with the general context. Since terrible is an adjective describing grandeur, the use of "terrible" would not fully reveal the intensity of the qualification of the French. In fact, the word "terrifying" is a closer equivalent. The adaptation reads, "The mere awareness of her terrifying height turned me to ice." This translation avoids the use of a faux-ami and the expansion in the first version.

Another constant problem in translating Le Torrent is the author's symbolic use of language. The choice of words is so exact, each meaning so precise, that there is truly no wasted or superfluous verbiage. Because of the need for expansion of certain passages, it is extremely difficult to produce the same effect in English. An intense concentration on both





the French and the English text is necessary. Particular images are predominant and indispensable throughout the narrative. In translation, they must be the same, reflecting the same continuity of meaning as in the original. The Torrent is one such image. It is capitalized throughout for the specific reason of its essential character in the meaning of the story. Such capitalization additionally avoids what might be considered unnecessary repetition and the choosing of various other words meaning the same thing but not conveying the same image and symbol.

The horse, Perceval, is treated with identical care for effect, because his presence and his appearance weave into the symbolic fabric along with those of the girl Amica and the references to the stray cat. In these cases, physical description, nuance and contiguity of meaning and images are of the utmost importance. All three are black, both Perceval and Amica have a blue-black mane of hair, both Amica and the cat are alike in their ways and in their sudden appearance and disappearance. Perceval is not only le cheval but also la bête, an important feminine noun that links him to the others. Thus, he does not have a mantle of skin, but a beautiful blue-black dress, "la belle robe noire aux reflets bleus" (p. 32). Similarly, Amica has a long blue mane of hair, though "longue chevelure bleue" could be rendered as a long blue tail of hair. The choice of tail over mane would be wrong because the identifica-





tion of Amica and Perceval is better facilitated by referring to the head of each. In fact, tail would be a ludicrous choice, since both hair and mane are closer semantically.

Finally, there is a matter of tone in the original that must be transferred to the English version. Movement, tone, attitude, are all integral parts of the original text. To mistranslate them, or to destroy their value in the translation by minimizing their importance, would make the final result worthless. In the original, these three properties are conveyed through the author's style: difficult, dark in tone, almost surgical in its precision of effect. One need only read the very first paragraph to determine this, then to check it with the translation to ascertain whether or not the translator has succeeded in producing at least a good rendition.

The problems in translating from French into English must be pursued through the affinities and disaffinities that generally exist between the two languages. What can be said about either will reveal why the two seem so close yet so far when it comes time to change one into the other. It was mentioned earlier that French is a language system that tends towards abstraction (le plan d'entendement), and English one tending towards concreteness (le plan du réel). In addition, each language possesses characteristics, not shared by the other, having to do directly with the manner in which each is utilized as communication.



Conceding that both languages often share what seems to be a partly common vocabulary, it must also be noted that the use made of such depends on the nature of each language. Whereas French is a grammatical system, tight in structure, precise in syntax and logical in progression, English is a lexical system, depending more on words than on a pre-conceived structure. It is looser syntactically, dependent more on lexical than grammatical relationships and associations. These are generalizations that can be proven by examining the two systems in action. Syntax is logic. In the same way, Greek and Latin, depended heavily on such order because it revealed a way of thinking. This is not to say that English is totally free of order, but rather that its syntax depends more on choice than rule. In this sense, English is more of a participatory language, while French is stabilized and fixed by rules. The one is inhibited by sense, the other by grammar.

What significance does the foregoing have in the case of literary translation? By making these distinctions, we only comment generally on the notion of style in each language. The questions arising from such distinctions can be many; such as, how does one translate well enough to retain certain merits of the original style and yet not falsify the effect in English? Translating Le Torrent was made easier by realizing what affinities and disaffinities there are between the two language systems.



Even though Anne Hébert's style in this story is difficult, often free of the normal syntactical rules, it still retains the general qualities of French as outlined earlier. The problems it poses for the translator are ones of meaning, exact meaning when obscurity is a quality of the original. The translation cannot clarify obscurities when they are intentional. To do so would require needless expansion. The recourse is to the mot juste. At the same time, the situation and context must provide the correct amount of information without destroying effect. Thus, those passages describing the narrator's delirium, the pain he suffers from having internalized the Torrent, his dream-like impressions, all have to be rendered to produce the same effect of delirium, pain and dream. Here is where English takes advantage over French: le fracas du torrent becomes "the crash of the Torrent"; cette masse sonore qui me frappait à la tête becomes "this mass of sound battering my head"; de quel gouffre suis-je le naufragé becomes "from what maelstrom am I castaway." In each case, the English is more descriptive, more imagistic in detail. The difference may appear slight at first, but in context, repeated throughout, the difference is much greater.

Similarly, though French and English may often be compatible in ordinary interpretation of meaning, the question of formal effect in literature depends strongly on the ability of each language to adapt to the demands of that effect. In literary





construction, French usually observes strict rules of structure. Not being prone to ellipsis as is English, it requires a rational style. In fact, when attempts are made to upset that rationality, as in surrealist poetry, a certain hermeticism develops contrary to rules of good grammar. Anne Hébert's style has this quality of upturned rationalism, so that in this instance French has more affinities with English. The prime example is perhaps the poetry of Mallarmé. Yet, the systems of the two languages, though they can have this rapprochement, retain their basic differences.

Even when syntactical barriers fall, lexical barriers still resist breaching. English vocabulary is vaster, assimilates more from various sources and changes more often, while French is less vast, grows more slowly and practically resists formal change.

Differences persisting are mainly those between mots signes and mots images.<sup>67</sup> To illustrate, I give the following example from Le Torrent. Here, we have a poetic passage, very descriptive in the original, unhampered by syntax, yet the translation, aided by all these factors in the original, has an advantage by being just a bit more evocative and more imagistic:

Ses jupes et châles la drapent et ne semblent retenus que par les agrafes mouvantes de ses mains, plus ou moins serrées, selon les caprices de sa démarche vive ou nonchalante. Un réseau de plis glissant de ses mains et renaissant plus loin en ondes pressées. Jeux des plis et des mains. Noeud de plis sur la poitrine en une seule main. Scintillement de soie trop tendue sur les épaules. Equilibre rompu, recréé ailleurs. Glissement de soie, épaule nue,



dévoilement des bras. Doigts si bruns sur la jupe rouge. La jupe est relevée à poignées, prestement, pour monter l'escalier. Les chevilles sont fines, les jambes parfaites. Un genou saillit. Tout est disparu. La jupe balaie le plancher, les mains sont libres et le corsage ne tient plus.

Her skirts and shawls cover her and seem to be held together by the moving clasp of her hands, opening and closing according to the will of her lively or listless bearing. A network of folds sliding from her hands soon becomes a series of pleated waves. A play of folds and fingers. A noose of folds at the chest held by a single hand. The glisten of silk stretched too tightly across the shoulders. The equilibrium broken, it reappears elsewhere on the torso. Silk slips, a shoulder is bare, arms are unveiled. Fingers so brown against the red skirt. The skirt is quickly lifted in fistfuls to climb the stairs. The ankles are trim, the legs perfect. A knee emerges. Everything has disappeared. The skirt sweeps along the floor, the hands are free, the bosom disappears.

The words to underline here are clasp, sliding, pleated, a play of folds and fingers, noose, sweeps along, and the bosom disappears. It must be noted again that because of the characteristics of the original, the translation is very close here. It is difficult to maintain that the English has some advantages over the original. But in the instances just underlined, and because of these, it adds a little more to the total effect. Agrafes is a plural noun, meaning hook or fastener or clasp. The choice of "clasp" in English gives it a verbal flavour lacking in the original, and describes the movement of the hand holding and moving across the bosom. "Sliding" is more of a mot image because it specifies a kind of action, whereas glissant is usually rendered as slipping, an action perhaps too quick



for the picture being described. The French, pressées, has a meaning of pressed, crowded, close, serried, hurried. In this case, it refers to the shape of the waves rather than to their action. Since the whole description is about silk, shawls and dresses, the choice of "pleated" is more precise, more evocative of the complete situation. "A play of folds and fingers" has an obvious advantage over the original. The alliteration heightens the image, is more delicate than that suggested by mains. Noeud was not translated as knot because this word is out of focus with the rest of the description. Since the shawl goes around the neck, and since an actual noose has more rope at the point where it joins, the image of the folds of the shawl held together at one point is better transmitted by "noose." Again, "sweeps along" simply adds a small detail missing in balaie. It gives the impression of motion, of graceful motion appropriate to the scene and person being described. Finally, le corsage ne tient plus in this context, has the meaning of the bosom no longer lasting, that is, of no longer being on the scene. This does not make good sense in English, and consequently must be rendered idiomatically. What takes place is normal translation, one idiomatic expression being replaced by its logical equivalent in the target language. The choice of the English verb "disappears," does not detract from the context nor from the image evoked. The person referred to metonymically departs the scene, and the metonymy





is made smoother by avoiding bad, but correct, choices such as: "is no more," "is no longer visible," "leaves," "moves away." The verb "disappears," says all this and more. The stress is put on the action rather than on the subject.

All this description just to describe a girl ascending a staircase; yet, it is an excellent illustration of the affinities and disaffinities between the two linguistic systems in question. The French here is very exact, while the English is more evocative. Even though the example from Le Torrent indicates how French can transcend its rules and regulations, the translation reveals that English can better exploit its lexicon. French is essentially a substantive language, presenting things as objects rather than as actions. English verbs are often translated by French verb phrases, because French lacks the ability always to make actions out of substantives: to surface, becomes remonter à la surface.

Additional problems in literary translation can be caused by dialogue, colloquialisms and onomatopoeia. In Le Torrent dialogue does not pose any great problem, for the principal reason that there is hardly any. However, there is some difficulty in conveying the familiarity of tone used by the man in the ditch when he addresses la grande Claudine. This kind of tutoiement is always difficult to transfer into English, but it can be conveyed partially by the right choice of words





and spellings in the translation. Colloquialisms are also difficult to render. They are not idioms, but references to local or socio-cultural phenomena. Thus, when François talks about l'année de ma rhétorique, we must realize this is a reference to the second year of classical studies, a system that once prevailed in Québec. Onomatopoeic words and phrases represent a great problem in translation, especially in poetry translation. Sounds make up an important part of many literary compositions. They are meant to enhance the total effect or the particular effect of a piece or passage, whatever the case may be. Many sound-words can be replaced in an idiomatic way. For instance, a French rooster sings, coco-ri cò, while an English one sings cockadoodle-do. These examples, and others like them, are socio-cultural ones, formed by the total system of the language they belong to. On the other hand, the peddler in Le Torrent who leaves the scene, pushing his cart cahin-caha, is a marvelous example of an instance where the French is totally superior in effect. The jolting, noisy, banging, ringing peddler's cart, suffers in translation, simply because the onomatopoeic effect cannot be retained or reproduced.

To demonstrate the differences and similarities between French and English, it would be necessary to carry on at very great length. The illustrations given above are not attempts to demonstrate how one is superior or inferior to the other.



They merely point out how translation is hindered or helped by the general character of each language, and how an understanding of this character aids the translator in his task.



## LE TORRENT: AN INTRODUCTION

Anne Hébert's short story is much like William Faulkner's The Bear. That is to say, its relation to the rest of French-Canadian literature takes on much the same significance as does the relation between Faulkner's story and American literature. It could be argued that both stories are a zenith point in their respective traditions. Each is like an emblem, an heraldic legend that typifies the house it came from.

If we take sides in the criticism written about Anne Hébert, it would have to be with those critics whose analyses probe the images and symbols, the meanings and structures of her work. Any genetic approach to Le Torrent, or to any other piece by the author, must perforce be rejected. So much of French-Canadian literary criticism dwells on the positivist approach to literature. For example, readers have been inundated with comments about Nelligan's madness, and Saint-Denys Garneau's and Anne Hébert's frailty. These poets' conditions notwithstanding, such an approach to Anne Hébert has to be rejected in favour of a more disinterested and more literary analysis.





The author's position in the literary history of French Canada speaks for itself. She comes after Saint-Denys Garneau and before the writers of "la révolution tranquille." Any reading of her work will immediately reveal its qualities: hermetic and personal. Generally, it would be admitted that such qualities necessarily restrict the effect or import of an author's creations. Therefore, Anne Hébert follows in a tradition of privateness established by Nelligan, taken up by Saint-Denys Garneau, and brought to its zenith by herself. A certain congruency of images and symbols, however, in the work of these three poets makes it accessible, albeit in a limited way. We are more or less limited to interpretations of personal anguish and experience, of an almost manichean dualism. On the other hand, diligent study has provided a bounty of information about the literary influences on these writers. The point is, that only recently have attempts been made to treat their work in a highly non-subjective way.<sup>1</sup>

How then, should Le Torrent be considered? It is most accessible through its superficial meaning, through its theme of conflict. It has been stated above that the story is emblematic; thus it represents the duality that has always characterized French-Canadian literature: the division of being. The same is manifested by the use and opposition of particular symbols. Water opposed to dryness invites life; the closed room or house opposed to the open land or water invites death.



The opposition of life and death reflects an archetypal conflict between the flesh and the spirit. The lesson to be learned from this conflict is that the traditional life of the spirit is really the death of the flesh, not its mere suppression but its death: a paradox indicating the seriousness of the division of being. The purpose of the conflict or its benefit is to be the escape from this division by destroying the traditional notion of life in asserting the notion of life through the physical senses; to reinstate the equilibrium of existence.

At once the struggle between instinct and reason, between instinctual and rational, ordered life, becomes apparent.<sup>2</sup> The struggle is engendered by the clash of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy of values. From this observation, one can proceed to an interpretation of opposition between the official collective order and the unofficial individual attempts to obliterate that order. The result is "dédoublement," the splitting of the personality by two equally strong forces.<sup>3</sup> Is this the extent of the meaning in Le Torrent? As stated, it is the superficial meaning, immediately visible on the surface of the text.

Deeper meaning can be attained by profounder analysis. There remains only for the analyst to choose his modus operandi. Gilles Houde prefers a psychological analysis based on methods



developed from Freudian and Jungian theories.<sup>4</sup> In particular, he uses the archetypal theories of Jung since they best fit into his study. While this procedure is entirely justified and worthwhile, it does limit itself in perspective to strict interpretation of symbols. Houde's main premise is that the conflict central to the story, reflects an opposition between the Conscious and the Subconscious. The former is represented by Claudine the mother, and the latter by François the son and narrator, and by the action of the Torrent on him. However, in the second part of the narrative, François becomes the symbol for the Conscious struggling for harmony with the Subconscious. Proceeding paragraph by paragraph, Houde does demonstrate the validity of his thesis and how the very structure of the story reveals it; but he often lapses into mere description of the action via its symbols. That is to say, that once the principal conflict has been revealed, analysis should not concern itself solely with enumerating instances of its occurrence. Of course, it must be conceded that the whole of the action is directed towards the elimination of this conflict.

However, if the critic concentrates on the description and interpretation of this conflict as it proceeds to its resolution, rather than simply pointing it out, he will produce a more valuable analysis of his subject because he attempts a closer examination of the whole structure and its interlock-





ing parts. This is not to say that Mr. Houde's study does not succeed, but rather that it is self-inhibiting by being too strict. He does not note the wider implications of his conclusions. On the other hand, he does note important constructive elements: the division of the narrative into two identifiable parts with rising and falling intensity.

The action is intensified by the extreme repression suffered by François, repression by his mother's will, and repression of the pull towards the instinctual life of the Torrent. This conflict climaxes in François sudden deafness and the sudden importance of the dominating Torrent:<sup>6</sup>

J'étais devenu sourd.

A partir de ce jour, une fissure se fit dans ma vie opprimée. Le silence lourd de la surdité m'envahit et la disponibilité au rêve qui se montrait une sorte d'accompagnement. Aucune voix, aucun bruit extérieur n'arrivait plus jusqu'à moi. Pas plus le fracas des chutes que le cri du grillon. De cela, je demeurais sûr. Pourtant, j'entendais en moi le torrent exister, notre maison aussi et tout le domaine. Je ne possédais pas le monde, mais ceci se trouvait changé: une partie du monde me possédait. Le domaine d'eau, de montagnes et d'autres bas venait de poser sur moi sa touche souveraine.<sup>7</sup>

Once the narrator is drawn into the world of the senses, he experiences a whirlpool of sensations and feelings. Though the Torrent represents a physical symbol of repressed existence, it also becomes the image of the narrator's actual condition: turbulence, loss of direction, loss of power,





absence of will, full domination by external natural forces. Furthermore, the narrator's inability to control his new condition, constitutes a falling action. He knows his condition but cannot direct it away from what seems to be a fatal course. Like the horse, Perceval, unable to be tamed by the mother, François desires escape from her cruel attempts to break his ego. Because of his deafness, and because of the Torrent's hold over him, François begins to truly experience the duality of his condition, the conflict between life in nature and death by reason whereas, in the first half of the narrative all he knew was the absolute control by his mother's will. Now he suddenly finds himself open to himself, unprotected and exposed to struggle.

The effect produces alienation of the Self. Before the horse's escape and the mother's death, François had only experienced denial and absence; denial of love, childhood and any physical existence; absence of other humans. His completely isolated and guarded existence is symbolized by the confines of his daily routine of chores and prayers, by the figurative significance of the house, and by maternal decree. He is thoroughly dispossessed of any personal existence. At the seminary where he is sent to learn self-denial and holiness, he learns only loneliness and fear. He keeps away from his fellow students because he cannot relate to them. They are the



outside, the temptations of evil, of life beyond the eternal vigilance of the self. Thus, his isolation is final.

Alienation therefore, is the movement inwards away from exterior existence into the very narrow prison of repression. Extreme denial of anything connected with real life produces a condition that must lead to actual death, for the grave or coffin is its ultimate symbol. The splitting of the personality that ensues occurs on different levels. On the surface, it takes the form of loneliness or solitude. Underneath this isolation, the Self undergoes successive change induced by the storm and stress of surface conditions. Denial and control by an overbearing Will, cause the person to experience overwhelming need for contact of any kind with any human other than the mother, as is the case with François. Frustration of these needs causes increased division of the ego. Finally, the desperation of such an irreparable state produces complete confusion, total exposure to the dividing forces, final collapse of rational existence. The extent of this alienation begins to unwind in the second part of the narrative, at the narrator's fascination with the horse, ending with the last paragraph of the story. The attempt to escape such existence constitutes the action of the second half. Though Mr. Houde can here make allusions to Icarus, what must be underlined is, the fact that François' attempt is the first of its kind in the whole of the literature he belongs to.



The mother dead, he is left to himself (p. 36):

Je n'ai pas de point de repère. Aucune horloge ne marque mes heures. Aucun calendrier ne compte mes années. Je suis dissous dans le temps. Règlements, discipline, entraves rigides, tout est par terre. Le nom de Dieu est sec et s'effrite. Aucun Dieu n'habita jamais ce nom pour moi. Je n'ai connu que des signes vides. J'ai porté trop longtemps mes chaînes. Elles ont eu le loisir de pousser des racines intérieures. Elles m'ont défait par le dedans. Je ne serai jamais un homme libre. J'ai voulu m'affranchir trop tard.

Actually, this is a revelation. The narrator understands he is too late to capture a life, life itself. As the horse has fled, so too his life. There is no choice but to follow events to their end.

These events are more than just mere happenings. They are a surge of activity that bring François to experience a nightmarish recognition of his final condition. He must endure a series of irreversible experiences. He becomes tormented by desire for woman, and goes out to find her. Each impulse to act, to counter passivity, is met by a painful reminder of his split existence, something which in itself prevents positive action. In order to find a woman, he must confront and admit to his solitude. Doing so, he bears witness to his alienation.

The girl he brings home, Amica, in many ways resembles Perceval; in spirit, in mystery, and with her blue-black hair like the horse's blue-black skin. She is the unknown, the purity of physical and instinctual life. But François can only suffer from his encounter with her (p. 48):





J'observe le couple étranger en sa nuit de noces. Je suis l'invité des noces. Amica montre une aisance, une habileté dans les caresses qui me plongent dans un étonnement rêveur. Elle dort. Les démons familiers appareillent dans les noires sculptures du lit. Ah! je ne serai plus seul tourmenté! Non, ils épargnent son sommeil calme. Ils se déploient de loin autour d'elle. Elle forme une île calme sur ma couche maudite.

This splitting into actor and spectator, not only forms the premise for the narration, but also occurred as such at the very moment when François is struck deaf by the mother (p. 28):

Ma mère bondit comme une tigresse. Très lucide, j'observais la scène. Tout en me reculant vers la porte, je ne pouvais m'empêcher de noter la force souple de cette longue femme. Son visage était tout défait, presque hideux. Je me dis que c'est probablement ainsi que la haine et la mort me défigureraient, un jour.

The splitting is the result of conflict. The conflict is ever present, for the mother prolongs her domination over the narrator right up to the end. Being dead, she truly becomes the symbol of the devastation wreaked by the conscious official life of strict education and belief in dualism (p. 56):

O ma mère, que je vous hais! et je n'ai pas encore tout exploré le champ de votre dévastation en moi. Une phrase hante mes nuits: "Tu es mon fils, tu me continues." Je suis lié à une damnée.

Such destruction pushes François to the very limits of his existence. The necessity voiced by the Torrent in his pounding temples is the invitation to final and complete discovery of the unknown (p. 57):



Je suis tiré près des chutes. Il est nécessaire que je regarde mon image intérieure. Je me penche sur le gouffre bouillonnant. Je suis penché sur moi.

The prospect of being found out by the girl, of being destroyed by her presence and the demands it makes on him drives François mad with fever and delirium. She represents possible destruction or invasion, not simply because she may discover the secret concerning his mother's death, but because she has invaded all possibilities of concealment that François previously enjoyed; she has opened all the closed spaces of his external and internal life. She has penetrated all the locked rooms of the house and stripped him of his last private refuge, robbed him of submergence into the deepest part of the Self (pp. 61-62):

La fièvre me glace et me consume. Que fait Amica? Que découvrira-t-elle? Se peut-il qu'elle trouve quelque chose?... Et ses longs cheveux bleus autour de mon cou. Ils m'étouffent.

Once she is gone, there remains only one thing to confront: complete and utter solitude, final and irrevocable alienation (p. 64):

A quoi me faut-il encore renoncer? Serait-ce à moi-même, à mon propre drame? Je n'ai jamais pensé au dépouillement de soi comme condition de l'être pur. D'ailleurs, je ne puis pas être pur. Je ne serai jamais pur. Je me rends à ma fin. Je m'absorbe et je suis néant. Je ne puis imaginer ma fin en dehors de moi. Là est peut-être mon erreur. Qui m'enseignera l'issue possible? Je suis seul, seul en moi.



To escape the condition of his conscious existence, François must push away its constricting effects, must attempt the final "adventure" of life (p. 65):

Je me penche tant que je peux. Je veux voir  
le gouffre, le plus près possible. Je veux me  
perdre en mon aventure, ma seule et épouvantable  
richesse.

Thus it ends, with a last attempt at re-integration, at reclaiming life in its fully ambivalent state. It is also escape into the unknown, the only potential means of becoming one with the rush of the Torrent and all it represents.

The basic elements in the construction of the narrative are threefold, resting on the idea of the Torrent, which is first mentioned after this observation: "Nous étions toujours seuls" (p. 12), and which forms part of the general description of the house and land. The next and most important mention of the Torrent is made just after François is struck deaf, when he describes how it now exists within him. Its real significance becomes explicit at this point, and is further intensified when François notes the hold it has over his day-to-day existence (p. 30). This is approximately half-way through the story and marks the beginning of the second part, more or less at the climax of the action.

The idea of the Torrent forms the symbolic foundation of the narrative. The three categories of elements build on it. The first, primary constituent forms the subject, the





statement of François' realization about himself: "J'étais un enfant dépossédé du monde./ Je n'ai pas de point de repère./ Je suis l'invité des noces./ Je veux me perdre en mon aventure, ma seule et épouvantable richesse."

In counterpoint is the countersubject: "Il faut se dompter jusqu'aux os./ Le monde n'est pas beau, François. Il ne faut pas y toucher./ Ma mère me frappa plusieurs fois à la tête. [...] J'étais devenu sourd./ Une phrase hante mes nuits: 'Tu es mon fils, tu me continues.'"

These first two constructive categories form a sort of exposition and motif. The third represents a kind of development much like a fugal composition: "Le domaine d'eau, de montagnes et d'autres bas venait de poser sur moi sa touche souveraine./ C'est vers ce temps que Perceval fit son arrivée chez nous./ Il n'y a de vivant que le paysage autour de moi./ Je l'appelle Amica."

The three divisions in the construction, based on the idea of the Torrent, represent the irreducible elements of the narrative. The first two provide the conflict or opposition between François and the multiple mother-symbol. The third elaborates the fundamental opposition of life and death, flesh and spirit, matter and mind. In concert, the three form a composite of François' human condition and the forces he cannot control but which control him. The forces build the contra-





puntal structure of the story; there is force and counter-force both of which play on the narrator's existence. His inability to distinguish and choose between the two and their relative qualities of good and bad, stems from the background of his life. Thus, the setting in the first half determines the action in the second half. There is no way, save for the final "adventure," open to François, no other means of reintegrating the Self but to destroy it. The act of union fails for him, both literally with Amica and figuratively with Perceval, even though the horse delivers him of his mother. Ultimate achievement depends on one's most precious possession; for François, his life. The Torrent underscores the event and dramatizes its significance: "ma seule et épouvantable richesse."

In closing, the analogy with The Bear provides further insight into the implications of Le Torrent for French-Canadian literature. Ike McCaslin, in Faulkner's story, represents a kind of alienated and assimilated Huck Finn, while Old Ben, the bear, an eternal Moby Dick of the land. The old slave of mixed origin, Sam Fathers, is Queequeg, Nigger-Jim and Natty Bumppo in one character. All together, the three represent a saga of the land, the wilderness, and of existence cursed by slavery and personal ownership, and of the necessity of relinquishing one's holdings in order to restore natural harmony. In Anne Hébert's story, the characters or events are also archetypal:



Claudine is "la femme canadienne," an enduring but perverted Maria Chapdelaine; François represents the effects of the former, the depersonalized male, empty ownership, the disjointed self, the disinherited heir seeking reintegration with his surroundings; Perceval and Amica are personifications of the land, of natural life, of what Old Ben and Moby Dick represent in their own tradition. Together, the three characters or symbols form the dramatic opposition that constitutes the central activity of the French-Canadian, and North American, literary tradition.

#### ADDENDA

Neither the problems of translating poetry, nor those presented by prose rhythms have been considered in this introduction, since these can be long and involved and are best treated in a lengthier study.

Anne Hébert's poetry has been translated, notably by F. R. Scott. His methods can be glimpsed in a dialogue between himself and the poet, where the features and peculiarities of Anne Hébert's poems are discussed.<sup>8</sup>



## NOTES

### ON TRANSLATION

<sup>1</sup>See Edmond Cary, "Pour une théorie de la traduction," Journal des traducteurs/Translators' Journal, 7 (1962), 118-127; 8 (1963), 3-11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., vol. 7, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 126. A Christianized version of the Buddha legend.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>9</sup>Pichois et Rousseau, La littérature comparée (Paris, 1967), p. 166. Alex. Tytler wrote Essay on the Principles of Translation, 1791.

<sup>10</sup>E. Cary, Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Flora Ross Amos, Early Theories of Translation (New York, 1920), chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 146.





<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>14</sup>E. Sapir, quoted by B.L. Whorf in Language, Thought, and Reality (New York, 1956), p. 134.

<sup>15</sup>B.L. Whorf, Ibid., part VI of "Foreword."

<sup>16</sup>Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in R.A. Brower, ed., On Translation (Cambridge, 1959), p. 234.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>18</sup>Benedetto Croce, Estetica (Bari, 1965), p. 76.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>20</sup>Giovanni Gentile, "Il torto e il diritto delle traduzioni," Rivista di Cultura, 2 (April 1920), p. 10. An English translation can be found in M.E. Brown, Neo-Idealistic Aesthetics (Detroit, 1966), p. 155.

<sup>21</sup>Renato Poggioli, "The Added Artificer," in R.A. Brower, ed., On Translation (Cambridge, 1959), p. 137.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>24</sup>John Hollander, "Versions, Interpretations, and Performances," in Brower, pp. 205-220.

<sup>25</sup>T.H. Savory, The Art of Translation (London, 1957), pp. 20-24.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 35.



<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>34</sup>Horst Frenz, "The Art of Translation," in Stallknecht and Frenz; eds., Comparative Literature (Carbondale, 1961), p. 80.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>36</sup>E. Nida, "Bible Translating," in Brower, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup>L. Forster, "Translation: An Introduction," in A.H. Smith, ed., Aspects of Translation (London, 1958), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>39</sup>L.W. Tancock, "Some Problems of Style in Translation from French," in A.H. Smith, p. 29.

<sup>40</sup>D.S. Carne-Ross, "Translation and Transposition," in William Arrowsmith, ed., The Craft and Context of Translation (Austin, 1961), p. 3.

<sup>41</sup>Jean Paris, "Translation and Creation," in Arrowsmith, pp. 57-58.

<sup>42</sup>Carne-Ross, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup>S.P. Bovie, "Translation as a Form of Criticism," in Arrowsmith, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup>Valery Larbaud, Sous l'invocation de Saint-Jérôme, Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1953), vol. 8, p. 85.



<sup>45</sup>W. Winter, "Impossibilities of Translation," in Arrowsmith, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup>J. Paris, p. 62.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>48</sup>William Arrowsmith, "The Lively Conventions of Translation," in Arrowsmith, p. 122.

<sup>49</sup>R. Shattuck, "Artificial Horizon: Translator as Navigator," in Arrowsmith, p. 152.

<sup>50</sup>Yves Bonnefoy, a recent French translator of Shakespeare, comments in two articles, "Comment traduire Shakespeare," Etudes Anglaises, 17 (1964), and "Transpose or Translate," Yale French Studies, 33 (1964), on the difficulties and solutions for translating Shakespeare. He upholds his own translation on the basis of the differences in the two languages concerned. Noting the qualities of the Bard's poetry and the semantic use he makes of form, Bonnefoy first maintains that poetry should be translated by poetry, because by nature it cannot be anything else, and then that a poetic form native to French should be used in translating. He chooses, for example, a metre of eleven feet ("le mètre de onze pieds"). However, the whole of Bonnefoy's argument rests on his understanding of poetry, being a poet himself, and the qualities of language (YFS, p. 126):

And this single principle--dialectical in the Greek sense of reciprocal enlightening--of dialogue should be affirmed at the end of our analysis: that the inevitable transpositions should deal with every minute detail possible. That for those works which are resolutely subjective, the transpositions should only be tactical. We do not want literalness but rather an attentive application. This is what, in my meaning, gives poetic interest to the enterprise and supplies it with its real chance. Here is an image, here are words--furtive, sometimes dissimulated, least exposed to the light of reason, at times sterile. It is not with our reasonable soul that we will be able to understand them---but this is the challenge which deepens our understanding. Translation becomes in the bargain a critique of our own thought and also of our existence and its sloths. To make





a decisive word of each word means to remain, with sure illwill sometimes, in the land of the greatest risk. This is quite clearly the translator's choice: having risked himself and his ardor--his disquiet and his hope; his energy and his turmoil--he expresses, by imposing a spirit on his words, by adding to the decisive and half-lost voice of the poet, the intensity of an accent.

Bonnefoy is discussing the dialogue between the text and the translator and his relationship to the languages he works with. Poetry is language of meanings, the translation should be likewise.

In order to clarify this argument, a difficult one surely, we should refer ourselves to Vinay and Darbelnet's Stylistique Comparée du français et de l'anglais. Their penetrating description of the innate differences in the two languages, demonstrates how the two oppose each other on different linguistic levels. French is on the "plan de l'entendement," while English is on the "plan du réel" (p. 9):

Le plan de l'entendement: Mode de représentation linguistique qui tend vers le général et l'abstrait, par opposition au plan du réel qui reste plus proche des images sensibles, et par conséquent serre de plus près les aspects concrets et particuliers. [...] Le plan de l'entendement utilise les mots signes et le plan du réel les mots images. Les images sensibles dominent sur le plan du réel, elles tendent à faire place aux rapports et aux idées sur le plan de l'entendement.

Essentially, this is how Bonnefoy conceives of the two languages, but in respect to poetry, they function in a similar way; that is, each has specific poetical characteristics that do not alter the basic nature of poetry in any language. For this reason, says Bonnefoy, Shakespeare must be rendered poetically in French as verse.

<sup>51</sup>Roman Jakobson, "Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in Brower.

-----, "Linguistics and Poetics," in S. Chatman and S.R. Levin, eds., Essays on the Language of Literature (Boston, 1967).

<sup>52</sup>Georges Mounin, Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction (Paris, 1963), p. 29. What Mounin points out is the





inability of various theories of language to admit the possibility of exchange between different linguistic groups who have different language systems:

La théorie bloomfieldienne en matière de sens impliquerait donc une négation, soit de la légitimité théorique, soit de la possibilité pratique, de toute traduction. Le sens d'un énoncé restant inaccessible, on ne pourrait jamais être certain d'avoir fait passer ce sens d'une langue dans une autre.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>54</sup>The factors of language are: ADDRESSER, ADDRESSEE, CONTEXT, CODE, MESSAGE, CONTACT. Each factor determines a corresponding function: EMOTIVE, CONATIVE, REFERENTIAL, METALINGUAL, POETIC, PHATIC (pp. 299 and 303).

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>58</sup>"On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," p. 233.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>60</sup>It has been established earlier above that meaning is the conjunction of content and form. However, form must not be confused with that of the original language.

<sup>61</sup>Mounin, p. 275.

<sup>62</sup>J.C. Catford, A Linguistic Theory of Translation (London, 1965), pp. 19-20.

<sup>63</sup>Mounin, Les belles infidèles (Paris, 1955), p. 7.

<sup>64</sup>See the "Conclusion" of Les problèmes théoriques..., and "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," p. 234.



<sup>65</sup>E.E. Milligan, "Some Principles and Techniques of Translation," Modern Language Journal, 41 (1957), p. 68.

<sup>66</sup>See Vinay and Darbelnet, La stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais (Montréal, 1963).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-115. See also, Jacques Duron, Langue française, langue humaine (Paris: Larousse, 1963); and Etiemble, Parlez-vous franglais? (Paris, 1964).

### LE TORRENT: AN INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Gilles Houde's study in La Barre du Jour, and papers given at the recent conference, November 1969, Poet and Critic, at the University of Alberta.

<sup>2</sup>F.M. Macri, "L'aliénation dans l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert et de P.K. Page" (unpublished M.A. thesis), Université de Sherbrooke, 1970, pp. 46-54.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Le Grand, "Anne Hébert: de l'exil au royaume," Etudes Françaises, 4, 1 (1968), complete article.

<sup>4</sup>Gilles Houde, "Les symboles et la structure mythique du Torrent," La Barre du Jour, no. 16 and 21.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., no. 16, pp. 30-31.

<sup>6</sup>Houde concurs.

<sup>7</sup>Anne Hébert, Le Torrent (Montréal, 1963), p. 29. The French original is quoted here and through this introduction. Further quotations are followed by their page reference in parentheses. The reader can very easily find the corresponding English in the translation that follows.

<sup>8</sup>Anne Hébert and Frank Scott, "La traduction: dialogue entre l'auteur et le traducteur," Ecrits du Canada Français, 7 (1960), 193-236.



## The Torrent

### I

I was a child dispossessed of the world. By decree of a will greater than my own, I was to renounce all forms of possession in this life. I touched only fragments of the world, only those things that were of immediate use to me; and these were quickly taken away from me as their usefulness was over. The notebook I opened, but not the table on which it was set. The corner of the stable I had to scrub, but never the hen perched in the window, and never over the fields that showed through it. I saw my mother's huge hand whenever it was raised up against me, but I never saw my mother in her

## Le Torrent

### I

J'étais un enfant dépossédé du monde. Par le décret d'une volonté antérieure à la mienne, je devais renoncer à toute possession en cette vie. Je touchais au monde par fragments, ceux-là seuls qui m'étaient immédiatement indispensables, et enlevés aussitôt leur utilité terminée; le cahier que je devais ouvrir, pas même la table sur laquelle il se trouvait; le coin d'étable à nettoyer, non la poule qui se perchait sur la fenêtre; et jamais, jamais la campagne offerte par la fenêtre. Je voyais la grande main de ma mère quand elle se levait sur moi, mais je n'apercevais pas ma mère en entier, de





entirety, from head to foot. The mere awareness of her terrifying height turned me to ice.

I had no childhood. I cannot recall a single moment of leisure before the unexpected occurrence of my deafness.

15 My mother always worked, never slackening her pace, and I followed it exactly, as if I were a tool in her hands. Up with the sun, the hours of her day fit together so tightly that no time was spared between them.

20 Outside of the lessons my mother gave me up until my entering the seminary, my mother never talked. Words did not fit into her scheme of things. For her to depart from such an order, I first had to commit some transgression or other. That is, my mother only spoke to reprimand me before punishing me.

piéd en cap. J'avais seulement le sentiment de sa terrible grandeur qui me glaçait.

Je n'ai pas eu d'enfance. Je ne me souviens d'aucun loisir avant cette singulière aventure de ma surdité. Ma mère travaillait sans relâche et je participais de ma mère, tel un outil dans ses mains. Levées avec le soleil, les heures de sa journée s'emboîtaient les unes dans les autres avec une justesse qui ne laissait aucune détente possible.

En dehors des leçons qu'elle me donna jusqu'à mon entrée au collège, ma mère ne parlait pas. La parole n'entrait pas dans son ordre. Pour qu'elle dérogeât à cet ordre, il fallait que le premier j'eusse commis une transgression quelconque. C'est-à-dire que ma mère ne m'adressait la parole que pour me réprimander, avant de me punir.



25           As for study, things there were counted too, calculated in time, without a single holiday or vacation. As soon as the lesson hour ended, my mother's expression was once again taken over by total incommunicability. Her mouth closed harshly, hermetically, as if it were held shut by a bar inside.

30           As for me, I lowered my eyes, relieved to no longer have to follow the workings of those strong jaws and of those thin lips that carefully pronounced, syllable by syllable, the words "punishment," "God's justice," "damnation," "hell," "discipline," "original sin." Above all, one very precise  
35 sentence whose repetition became a kind of leitmotif,

    --"You must train yourself, break yourself to the bone. You have no idea of the evil forces within us! Do you understand, François? I'll break you myself, sure enough..."

    Au sujet de l'étude, là encore tout était compté, calculé, sans un jour de congé, ni de vacances. L'heure des leçons terminée, un mutisme total envahissait à nouveau le visage de ma mère. Sa bouche se fermait durement, hermétiquement, comme tenue par un verrou tiré de l'intérieur.

    Moi, je baissais les yeux, soulagé de n'avoir plus à suivre le fonctionnement des puissantes mâchoires et des lèvres minces qui prononçaient, en détachant chaque syllabe, les mots de "châtiment," "justice de Dieu," "damnation," "enfer," "discipline," "péché originel," et surtout cette phrase précise qui revenait comme un leitmotiv:

    --"Il faut se dompter jusqu'aux os. On n'a pas idée de la force mauvaise qui est en nous. Tu m'entends, François? Je te dompterai bien, moi..."



At this, I would begin to tremble and tears filled  
40 my eyes, for I knew very well what my mother was going to add:

--"François, look me in the eye..."

This torture could last for a considerable time. My  
mother stared at me mercilessly, while I could not bring my-  
self to look at her. She added in getting up:

45 --"Very well, François, the lesson is over... But  
I'll remember your ill will, at the proper time and place..."

In fact, my mother minutely registered every one of  
my shortcomings in order to take me to task some fine day,  
when I least expected it. The very moment I felt I could es-  
50 cape, she descended on me, implacably, having forgotten nothing,  
detailing day by day, hour by hour, the very things I believed  
to be most hidden.

Là, je commençais à frissonner et des larmes emplis-  
saient mes yeux, car je savais bien ce que ma mère allait  
ajouter:

--"François, regarde-moi dans les yeux..."

Ce supplice pouvait durer longtemps. Ma mère me  
fixait sans merci et moi je ne parvenais pas à me décider à la  
regarder. Elle ajoutait en se levant:

--"C'est bien, François, l'heure est finie... Mais  
je me souviendrai de ta mauvaise volonté, en temps et lieu..."

En fait, ma mère enregistrerait minutieusement chacun  
de mes manquements pour m'en dresser le compte, un beau jour,  
quand je ne m'y attendais plus. Juste au moment où je croyais  
m'échapper, elle fondait sur moi, implacable, n'ayant rien  
oublié, détaillant, jour après jour, heure après heure, les  
choses mêmes que je croyais les plus cachées.





I could not understand why my mother did not punish me on the spot. Moreover, I was vaguely aware that she was  
55 keeping herself under control with great difficulty. Subsequently, I came to realize that she acted this way out of discipline: "to break herself," and also to affect me more certainly by establishing her hold over me as deeply as possible.

There was, in fact, another reason, one that I only  
60 discovered much later.

I have said that my mother was forever at work, either in the house, or in the stable or in the fields. She would wait to discipline me until there was a break in the daily routine.

65 While working the other day, I found a little notebook belonging to my mother, hidden away on a beam behind an old lantern. Her daily schedule was carefully written out in

Je ne distinguais pas pourquoi ma mère ne me punissait pas sur-le-champ. D'autant plus que je sentais confusément qu'elle se dominait avec peine. Dans la suite j'ai compris qu'elle agissait ainsi par discipline: "pour se dompter elle-même," et aussi certainement pour m'impressionner davantage en établissant son emprise le plus profondément possible sur moi.

Il y avait bien une autre raison que je n'ai découverte que beaucoup plus tard.

J'ai dit que ma mère s'occupait sans arrêt, soit dans la maison, soit dans l'étable ou les champs. Pour me corriger, elle attendait une trêve.

J'ai trouvé, l'autre jour, dans la remise, sur une poutre, derrière un vieux fanal, un petit calepin ayant appartenu à ma mère. L'horaire de ses journées y était soigneuse-





it. On a certain Monday, she was to spread the sheets out on the grass to whiten them; I remember that it began to rain suddenly. On that very date, I then noticed, this strange woman  
 70 had crossed out: "Set out sheets," and had added in the margin: "Beat François."

We were always alone, she and I. I was going on twelve and had not yet beheld a human face, other than the  
 75 moving reflection of my own whenever I bent over to drink from a summer stream. As for my mother, only the bottom of her face was familiar to me. My eyes never dared go higher on her face, up to the angry stare, up to the wide forehead that I later discovered to be fiercely lined and pitted.

80 Her imperious chin, her distorted mouth, in spite of the attitude of calm that silence gave it, her black bodice like armour plate that betrayed no chink of tenderness for the

ment inscrit. Un certain lundi, elle devait mettre des draps à blanchir sur l'herbe; et, je me souviens que brusquement il s'était mis à pleuvoir. En date de ce même lundi, j'ai donc vu dans son carnet que cette étrange femme avait rayé: "Blanchir les draps," et ajouté dans la marge: "Battre François."

Nous étions toujours seuls. J'allais avoir douze ans et n'avais pas encore contemplé un visage humain, si ce n'est le reflet mouvant de mes propres traits, lorsque l'été je me penchais pour boire aux ruisseaux. Quant à ma mère, seul le bas de sa figure m'était familier. Mes yeux n'osaient monter plus haut, jusqu'aux prunelles courroucées et au large front que je connus, plus tard, atrocement ravagé.

Son menton impératif, sa bouche tourmentée, malgré l'attitude calme que le silence essayait de lui imposer, son corsage noir, cuirassé, sans nulle place tendre où pût se



child that might have snuggled there, all these things made up the maternal universe where at such an early age I learned  
 85 harshness and rejection.

We lived too far from the village, even to go to Mass. But this did not prevent me from sometimes spending the whole of Sunday on my knees, on the hard floor, as punishment for some misdeed or other. This was, I believe, my  
 90 mother's way of keeping the Lord's Day, at my expense.

I never saw my mother at prayer. But I suspected she prayed sometimes, shut up in the privacy of her room. At this time, I was so dependent on my mother, that the least of her inner upheavals reverberated in me. Oh, I understood  
 95 nothing of course, of this woman's private dramas! But I absorbed the shocks of her most secret moods just as one perceives an oncoming storm. So, on the nights I thought my

blottir la tête d'un enfant; et voilà l'univers maternel dans lequel j'appris, si tôt, la dureté et le refus.

Nous demeurions à une trop grande distance du village, même pour aller à la messe. Cela ne m'empêchait pas de passer quelquefois mon dimanche presque entier à genoux sur le plancher, en punition de quelque faute. C'était là, je crois, la façon maternelle de sanctifier le jour du Seigneur, à mes dépens.

Je n'ai jamais vu ma mère prier. Mais, je soupçonnais qu'elle le faisait, parfois, enfermée dans sa chambre. Dans ce temps-là, j'étais si dépendant de ma mère que le moindre mouvement intérieur chez elle se répercutait en moi. Oh! je ne comprenais rien, bien entendu, au drame de cette femme, mais je ressentais, comme on perçoit l'orage, les sautes de son humeur la plus secrète. Or, les soirs où je croyais ma



mother to be occupied with her prayers, I dared not move on my pallet. The silence was as heavy as death. I waited for  
100 some fierce blast that would sweep away everything, carrying me off with my mother, tied forever to her fatal destiny.

The one desire I had, became stronger day by day and hung over me like an obsession: to see up close the detail of another human face. I tried to examine my mother's on the sly,  
105 but almost always she turned on me quickly, and I would lose courage.

I resolved to search out the face of a man, not daring to hope for a child's, and promising myself to flee if it were a woman's instead. To do so, I should have to post  
110 myself at the side of the highway. This adventure would surely end with someone passing by.

mère occupée à prier, je n'osais bouger sur ma pailleasse. Le silence était lourd à mourir. J'attendais je ne sais quelle tourmente qui balayerait tout, m'entraînant avec ma mère, à jamais lié à son destin funeste.

Ce désir que j'avais augmentait de jour en jour et me pesait comme une nostalgie. Voir de près et en détail une figure humaine. Je cherchais à examiner ma mère à la dérobée; mais, presque toujours, elle se retournait vivement vers moi et je perdais courage.

Je résolus d'aller à la rencontre d'un visage d'homme, n'osant espérer un enfant et me promettant de fuir si c'était une femme. Pour cela je voulais me poster au bord de la grande route. Il finirait bien par passer quelqu'un.





Our house was well away from all lines of communication to the outside, situated in the centre of a property that contained woods, fields and every possible form of water, from  
 115 the still brook to the rushing Torrent.

I crossed the sugarbush and the long fields salted with sharp stones, fields my mother, gritting her teeth, stubbornly worked; the plough handles sprung from her grip each time the stones sent up a heavy shock. Our old horse, Eloi,  
 120 died from such labour, poor beast.

I did not think the highway was so far away. I was afraid of getting lost. What would my mother say, when, after milking the cows, she discovered my absence? I cringed in anticipation of her blows; but I kept on walking. My desire  
 125 was too pressing, too desperate.

Notre maison s'élevait à l'écart de toute voie de communication, au centre d'un domaine de bois, de champs et d'eau sous toutes ses formes, depuis les calmes ruisseaux jusqu'à l'agitation du torrent.

Je traversai l'érablière et les grands champs tout en boutons durs que ma mère s'obstinait à labourer en serrant les dents, les mains attachées aux mancherons que le choc lui faisait parfois lâcher. Notre vieux cheval, Eloi, en est mort, lui.

Je ne croyais pas la route si loin. Je craignais de me perdre. Que dirait ma mère, au retour de la traite des vaches, quand elle s'apercevrait de mon absence? D'avance je me recroquevillais sous les coups, mais je continuais de marcher. Mon désir était trop pressant, trop désespéré.



After the small patch of burnt clearing where I used to pick blueberries with my mother every summer, I found myself confronted by the highway. Out of breath, I stopped short just as if a hand had touched my forehead. I wanted to cry.

130 The sad road lay stretched out woefully, one with the sun's heat: soulless and dead. Where were the processions I imagined I would discover? Was it on that surface that footsteps other than mine or my mother's had made their way? What had become of those others? Where were they headed? Not a single  
135 trace of them. The road must surely be dead.

I dared not walk on it. I followed it in the ditch. Suddenly, I stumbled over a body lying on the ground, and flew headlong into the mud. I picked myself up, dismayed at the thought of my dirty clothes. Beside me, I saw the horrible  
140 looking man. He must have been sleeping there, and now he was

Après le petit brûlé où chaque été je venais cueillir des bluets avec ma mère, je me trouvais face à face avec la route. Essoufflé, je m'arrêtais court, comme touché au front par une main. J'avais envie de pleurer. La route s'étendait triste, lamentable, unie au soleil, sans âme, morte. Où se trouvaient les cortèges que je m'imaginais découvrir? Sur ce sol-là s'étaient posés des pas autres que les miens ou ceux de ma mère. Qu'étaient devenus ces pas? Où se dirigeaient-ils? Pas une empreinte. La route devait certainement être morte.

Je n'osais marcher dessus et je suivais le fossé. Tout à coup, je butai sur un corps étendu et fus projeté dans la vase. Je me levai, consterné, à la pensée de mes habits salis; et je vis l'homme horrible à côté de moi. Il devait



slowly sitting up. I froze, not moving a hair, waiting to be killed at the very least. I could not even summon the strength to shield my face with my arm.

The man was dirty. His skin and clothes were covered  
 145 with both wet and dry mud. His long hair tangled in his beard, his moustache and his enormous eyebrows, which fell over his eyes. My God, what a face! bristling with hair and stained with mud! I saw the sticky mouth and the yellow teeth. I wanted to run away, but the man held on to me by the arm. He latched on to me in an at-  
 150 tempt to pull himself up, an effort that toppled me over again.

The man laughed. His laugh truly suited him--it was as base as his appearance. Once more, I tried to get away. He made me sit down beside him on the edge of the ditch. I smelled his musky odour as it blended with the smell from the  
 155 bog. Under my breath, I said an Act of Contrition, and I

dormir là, et maintenant il s'asseyait lentement. Cloué sur place, je ne bougeais pas, m'attendant à être tué pour le moins. Je ne trouvais même pas la force de me garantir le visage avec mon bras.

L'homme était sale. Sur sa peau et ses vêtements alternaient la boue sèche et la boue fraîche. Ses cheveux longs se confondaient avec sa barbe, sa moustache et ses énormes sourcils qui lui tombaient sur les yeux. Mon Dieu, quelle face faite de poils hérissés et de taches de boue! Je vis la bouche se montrer là-dedans, gluante, avec des dents jaunes. Je voulus fuir. L'homme me retint par le bras. Il s'agrippa à moi pour tenter de se mettre debout, ce qui eut pour effet de me faire culbuter.

L'homme rit. Son rire était bien de lui. Aussi ignoble que lui. Encore une fois je tentai de me sauver. Il me fit asseoir sur le bord du fossé, près de lui. Je sentais son odeur fauve se mêler aux relents du marécage. Tout bas, je faisais mon acte de contrition, et je pensais à la justice





thought of God's justice, a justice which for me would be the continuation of the terror and disgust this man caused in me. His filthy hand was heavy on my shoulder.

---"How old are you, kid?"

160 Without waiting for my reply, he added:

---"Do you know any good stories? No, eh?... Me, I know a few..."

He put his arm around my shoulders. I tried to free myself, but he squeezed me tighter, laughing again. His laugh  
165 was very close to my cheek. At that instant, I spied my mother standing in front of us. In her hand, she held the heavy prodder used to bring the cows in. For the first time, I actually saw all of her, tall, strong, clean, more powerful than I ever imagined her to be.

170 ---"Let go of that child!"

de Dieu qui, pour moi, ferait suite à la terreur et au dégoût que m'inspirait cet homme. Il avait sa main malpropre et lourde sur mon épaule.

---"Quel âge as-tu, petit gars?"

Sans attendre ma réponse, il ajouta:

---"Connais-tu des histoires? Non, hein... Moi, j'en connais..."

Il passa son bras autour de mes épaules. J'essayai de me dégager. Il serrait plus fort, en riant. Son rire était tout près de ma joue. A ce moment, j'aperçus ma mère devant nous. Dans sa main elle tenait la maîtresse branche qui servait à faire rentrer les vaches. Ma mère m'apparut pour la première fois dans son ensemble. Grande, forte, nette, plus puissante que je ne l'avais jamais cru.

---"Lâchez cet enfant!"





Surprised, the man rose to his feet with some difficulty. He seemed to be as fascinated by my mother as I was. My mother, turning to me, shouted in a tone used to address dogs:

175               --"Home, François!"

Slowly, feeling my legs slipping under me, I went back to the path through the burnt clearing. The man was talking to my mother. He seemed to know her. He was saying, in a drawling voice:

180               --"If it isn't beautiful Claudine!... Imagine finding you here!... You left the village because of the little one, eh?... A goodlookin' kid... yeah, real good... Of all places!... Everyone thought you were dead..."

                  --"On your way!" my mother thundered out.

185               --"Big Claudine, so goodlooking once... Don't get angry..."

L'homme, surpris, se leva péniblement. Il semblait fasciné par ma mère autant que je l'étais. Ma mère se retourna vers moi et, du ton sur lequel on parle à un chien, elle me cria:

                  --"A la maison, François!"

Lentement, sentant mes jambes se dérober sous moi, je repris le sentier du brûlé. L'homme parlait à ma mère. Il paraissait la connaître. Il disait de sa voix traînante:

                  --"Si c'est pas la belle Claudine!... Te retrouver ici!... T'as quitté le village à cause du petit, hein?... Un beau petit gars... oui, ben beau... Te retrouver ici!... Tout le monde te pensait défunte..."

                  --"Allez-vous-en!" tonna ma mère.

                  --"La grande Claudine, si avenante, autrefois... Fâche-toi pas..."



--"Pig! Don't you dare be familiar with me!"

At this point, I heard the noise of a heavy blow, followed by the muffled sound of something hitting the ground.

190 I turned around. My mother was standing, immense against the edge of the forest, the heavy stick quivering in her hand, the man stretched out at her feet. She must have used the thick end to hit him on the head.

Big Claudine (for this is how I mentally took to calling my mother) made sure the man was still alive, gathered her skirts and, jumping across the ditch, continued once more along the way to the house. I took off at a run. The echo of my panicked flight resounded in my ears along with the sound of my mother's robust stride behind me.

200 Near the house, she caught up with me. Dragging me by the arm, she entered the kitchen. She had thrown the prodder

--"Je vous défends de me tutoyer, cochon!"

Là, j'entendis le bruit sec d'un coup, suivi par le bruit sourd d'une chute. Je me retournai. Ma mère était debout, immense, à la lisière du bois, la trique toute frémissante à la main, l'homme étendu à ses pieds. Elle avait dû se servir du gros bout du bâton pour frapper l'homme à la tête.

La grande Claudine (c'est ainsi que mentalement je me prenais à nommer ma mère) s'assura que l'homme était vivant, ramassa ses jupes, sauta le fossé et s'engagea à nouveau dans le chemin de la maison. Je partis à courir. L'écho de mes pas affolés résonnait à mes oreilles en même temps que celui des robustes enjambées de ma mère, derrière moi.

Elle me rattrapa en arrivant près de la maison. Me traînant par le bras, elle entra dans la cuisine. Elle avait



away. I was so frightened and so tired out, yet I could not help feeling an inexplicable sense of curiosity and attraction. Somehow, I vaguely believed that what was to follow would  
 205 equal what had just taken place. All my senses, deadened by a restrained and monotonous life, awakened. I was living an amazing and terrifying adventure.

My mother stated in a cutting voice:

—"Beautiful, isn't it? A human being, eh François?  
 210 You should be glad you've finally seen another face up close. Tempting, isn't it?"

Profoundly shaken by the fact that my mother could have divined a desire that I had never confided to her, I lifted my eyes to her as one who had lost control over himself.  
 215 As her little talk unfolded, my bewildered eyes were held by hers. I was paralysed, magnetized by big Claudine.

jeté le bâton. J'étais si effrayé, si moulu, et pourtant je ne pouvais m'empêcher d'éprouver un inexplicable sentiment de curiosité et d'attrait. Je croyais obscurément que ce qui allait suivre serait à la hauteur de ce qui venait de se passer. Mes sens, engourdis par une vie contrainte et monotone, se réveillaient. Je vivais une prestigieuse et terrifiante aventure.

Ma mère dit d'une voix coupante:

—"C'est beau un être humain, hein, François? Tu dois être content d'avoir enfin contemplé de près un visage. C'est ragoûtant, n'est-ce pas?"

Au comble du trouble de voir que ma mère avait pu deviner un désir que je ne lui avais jamais confié, je levai les yeux sur elle, semblable à quelqu'un qui a perdu tout contrôle de soi. Et, c'est mes yeux égarés retenus dans les siens, que se déroula tout l'entretien. J'étais paralysé, magnétisé par la grande Claudine.





— "The world is not beautiful, François. You mustn't reach out for it. Give up trying to, quickly and generously. Don't dally. Do as you're told, without stopping to take in the scenery. You are my son. Your life will continue my life. You will fight to overcome your evil instincts, until you achieve perfection."

Her eyes were on fire. Her entire body, pulled up straight in the middle of the room, became a gesture of uncontrollable violence, freezing me with fear and admiration at the same time. She repeated, her voice less harsh as if she were talking to herself:

— "Complete possession of the self, mastery of the self. Above all, never be overcome by the self..."

My mother stopped. Her long hands were already calm, and through them calmness travelled to the rest of her body.

— "Le monde n'est pas beau, François. Il ne faut pas y toucher. Renonces-y tout de suite, généreusement. Ne t'attarde pas. Fais ce que l'on te demande, sans regarder alentour. Tu es mon fils. Tu me continues. Tu combattras l'instinct mauvais, jusqu'à la perfection..."

Ses yeux lançaient des flammes. Tout son être droit, dressé au milieu de la pièce, exprimait une violence qui ne se contenait plus, et qui me figeait à la fois de peur et d'admiration. Elle répétait, la voix moins dure, comme se parlant à elle-même: "La possession de soi... la maîtrise de soi... surtout n'être jamais vaincu par soi..."

Ma mère s'arrêta. Ses longues mains étaient déjà calmes, et le calme rentra par là dans toute sa personne.



She went on, her look almost turned in on itself. Only the flash of her eyes refused to completely desert her expression, in the same way the reminders of merrymaking are left behind  
 235 in an empty house.

--"François, I will return to the village, my head held high. Everyone will nod politely to me. I will have won! To win! No drunken sot will slobber on me, nor touch my son. You are my son. You will overcome all evil thoughts  
 240 and desires, you will be perfect. You will be a priest! Respect! Respect, what a victory over all of them!"

A priest! This seemed so overwhelming, especially on that day when I so hurt from my humble search for some endearing countenance. My mother often explained to me: "The  
 245 Mass is a Sacrifice. The priest is both celebrant and victim, like Christ. He must immolate himself thanklessly on the

Elle continua, le visage presque fermé. Seul l'éclat des yeux ne se retirait pas tout à fait, ainsi que les restes d'une fête dans une maison déserte.

--"François, je retournerai au village, la tête haute. Tous s'inclineront devant moi. J'aurai vaincu! Vaincre! Je ne permettrai pas qu'un salaud d'ivrogne bave sur moi et touche à mon fils. Tu es mon fils. Tu combattras l'instinct mauvais, jusqu'à la perfection. Tu seras prêtre! Le respect! Le respect, quelle victoire sur eux tous!

Prêtre! Cela me paraissait tellement accablant, surtout en cette journée où j'avais été si blessé dans ma pauvre attente d'un visage doux. Ma mère m'expliquait souvent: "La Messe, c'est le Sacrifice. Le prêtre est à la fois sacrificateur et victime, comme le Christ. Il fallait qu'il



altar with the Host." I was still very young at the time and had never been happy. I broke out sobbing. My mother just stopped short of hurling herself at me, then she turned on her  
 250 heels, saying in a clipped voice:

--"Crybaby! Weakling! I've received an answer from the Father Superior. You'll be going next Thursday, September fourth, to the Seminary. Fetch me an armful of kindling so I can light the stove for supper. Move!"

255 My textbooks had belonged to my mother when she was young. That evening, under the pretext of packing my bags for the Seminary, I went over these books, one by one, staring avidly at the name inscribed on every flyleaf: "Claudine Perrault"... Claudine, beautiful Claudine, big Claudine...

260 The letters of the first name danced before my eyes, twisting like flames, taking on fantastic shapes. It had

s'immolât sur l'autel, sans merci, avec l'hostie." J'étais si petit et je n'avais jamais été heureux. J'éclatai en sanglots. Ma mère faillit se jeter sur moi, puis tourna les talons en disant de sa voix brève:

--"Pleurnichard! Enfant sans énergie! J'ai reçu la réponse du directeur; tu entreras au collège, jeudi prochain, le quatre septembre. Va me chercher une brassée de petit bois que j'allume le poêle pour le souper. Allons, remue-toi!

Mes livres d'étude avaient appartenu à ma mère lorsqu'elle était enfant. Ce soir-là, sous prétexte de préparer mes bagages pour le collège, je pris les livres, un par un, et regardai avec avidité le nom qui s'inscrivait en première page de chacun d'eux: "Claudine Perrault"... Claudine, la belle Claudine, la grande Claudine...

Les lettres du prénom dansaient devant mes yeux, se tordaient comme des flammes, prenant des formes fantastiques.





never struck me before, that my mother's name was Claudine.

And now, it seemed strange to me, it made me feel ill. I

could no longer tell whether or not I was reading this new

265 name for the first time, or hearing it pronounced by the  
raucous voice of some demon whose breath I felt close on my  
cheek.

My mother drew nearer. This did not dissipate the  
clinging atmosphere, nor free me of my oppressive state of

270 mind. Instead, her presence gave the whole scene a super-  
natural weight. The kitchen was darkened and sombre, the  
only circle of light being projected on the book I held open  
under the lamp. In that sphere of light, my mother's hands  
suddenly flew into action. She seized the book. For a moment  
275 the name "Claudine" written in large, wilful letters caught  
the light, then disappeared, and I saw a new name traced out

Cela ne m'avait pas frappé auparavant que ma mère s'appelât  
Claudine. Et maintenant, cela me semblait étrange, cela me  
faisait mal. Je ne savais plus si je lisais ce nom ou si je  
l'entendais prononcer par une voix éraillée, celle d'un démon,  
tout près de moi, son souffle touchant ma joue.

Ma mère s'approcha de moi. Elle n'allégea pas l'at-  
mosphère. Elle ne me sauva pas de mon oppression. Au con-  
traire, sa présence donnait du poids au caractère surnaturel  
de cette scène. La cuisine était sombre, le seul rond de  
clarté projeté par la lampe tombait sur le livre que je tenais  
ouvert. Dans ce cercle lumineux, les mains de ma mère en-  
trèrent en action. Elle s'empara du livre. Un instant le  
"Claudine" écrit en lettres hautes et volontaires capta toute  
la lumière, puis il disparut et je vis venir à la place, tracé





in the same haughty script come to take its place: "François."  
 A "François" in fresh ink coupled to a "Perrault" in faded ink.  
 And so, in that narrow beam of light, in the space of a few  
 280 moments, those long hands set and sealed my fate. All my text-  
 books yielded to her hand. My mother's words hammered inside  
 my head: "You are my son. Your life will continue my life."

Once that extraordinary day had passed, I forced my-  
 self, on my mother's orders, to push it out of my mind. Formed  
 285 so long by an iron rule, I succeeded in no longer consciously  
 thinking of those past scenes, and in mechanically fulfilling  
 my imposed duties. However, deep down inside of me, I some-  
 times felt an unknown and dangerous exuberance that surprised  
 and troubled me by its sleeping presence.

290 The practical result, so to speak, of my first encoun-  
 ter with another and different person, was to put me on my guard,

de la même calligraphie altière: "François." Un "François"  
 en encre fraîche, accolé au "Perrault" de vieille encre. Et  
 ainsi dans ce rayon étroit, en l'espace de quelques minutes,  
 les mains longues jouèrent et scellèrent mon destin. Tous  
 mes livres y passèrent. Cette phrase de ma mère me martelait  
 la tête: "Tu es mon fils. Tu me continues."

Ce jour extraordinaire disparu, je m'efforçai, sur  
 l'ordre de ma mère, de le repousser de ma mémoire. Formé de-  
 puis longtemps par une règle de fer, je réussis assez bien à  
 ne plus penser consciemment aux scènes écoulées et à accomplir  
 mécaniquement les tâches imposées. Cependant, au fond de moi,  
 je sentais parfois une richesse inconnue, redoutable, qui  
 m'étonnait et me troublait par sa présence endormie.

Le résultat pratique, si l'on peut dire, de ma pre-  
 mière rencontre avec autrui, fut de me mettre sur mes gardes



thus forever stifling any spontaneous gestures of human sympathy. My mother could mark up another victory.

295 So disposed, I entered the Seminary. I observed my fellow students with a wild and pent-up look. I thrust off their timid or good-natured advances. Soon the new student was surrounded by an emptiness. I told myself it was better this way, since it was important not to become attached to any place or to anyone in this world. Moreover, I imposed  
300 certain penances on myself for the uneasiness I experienced because of my isolation.

My mother wrote: "I am not there to watch you. Mortify yourself. Above all, overcome indolence, your greatest fault. Do not let yourself be softened by the mirage of some  
305 particular friendship. Everyone, teachers and students, is at your disposal only for the time being, necessary for your

et de replier à jamais en moi tout geste spontané de sympathie humaine. Ma mère enregistrait une victoire.

J'entrai au collège dans ces dispositions. L'air sauvage et renfermé, j'observais mes camarades. Je repoussais leurs avances timides ou railleuses. Bientôt le vide se fit autour du nouvel élève. Je me disais que c'était mieux ainsi, puisqu'il ne fallait m'attacher nulle part en ce monde. Puis, je m'imposais des pénitences pour cette peine que je ressentais de mon isolement.

Ma mère m'écrivait: "Je ne suis pas là pour te dresser. Impose-toi, toi-même, des mortifications. Surtout, combats la mollesse, ton défaut dominant. Ne te laisse pas attendrir par le mirage de quelque amitié particulière. Tous, professeurs et élèves, ne sont là que pour un certain moment,



education and formation. Take advantage of what they must give you, but hold yourself in check. Do not let yourself go, at any cost, or you will be lost. Besides, I am kept  
 310 informed of all that happens at the Seminary. You will give an exact account of yourself to me during the holidays, and to God on Judgement Day. Do not waste your time. As for your free time, I have an understanding with the Father Superior. You will help the tenant farmer in the stables and  
 315 fields."

Farmwork was not new for me, and I preferred to occupy myself this way rather than have to join the others during recreation. I knew neither how to play nor how to laugh, and I felt that my presence was superfluous. As for  
 320 the teachers, rightly or wrongly, I considered them to be my mother's allies. I was especially on my guard with them.

nécessaire à ton instruction et à ta formation. Profite de ce qu'ils doivent te donner, mais réserve-toi. Ne t'abandonne à aucun prix, ou tu serais perdu. D'ailleurs, on me tient au courant de tout ce qui se passe au collège. Tu m'en rendras un compte exact aux vacances, et à Dieu aussi, au jour de la justice. Ne perds pas ton temps. Pour ce qui est des récréations, je me suis entendue avec le directeur. Tu aideras le fermier, à l'étable et aux champs."

Le travail de la ferme me connaissait et je préférais m'occuper ainsi que d'avoir à suivre mes camarades en récréation. Je ne savais ni jouer ni rire et je me sentais de trop. Quant aux professeurs, à tort ou à raison, je les considérais les alliés de ma mère. Et j'étais particulièrement sur mes gardes avec eux.







I studied all the years that followed at the Seminary. That is, my memory registered dates, names, rules, precepts and formulae. Faithful to my maternal initiation, I  
 325 only wanted to retain the external signs of the material studied. I kept myself from any real knowledge, which comes from experience and possession. Thus, in regard to God, I grappled all the forces of my will to the innumerable prayers recited daily, in order to insure I would have some wall of protection  
 330 against the shadowy possibility of His real face.

My marks were always excellent, and out of habit, I came first in class as my mother required.

I considered the formal structure of a classical tragedy or poem to be a mere mechanism of rules and devices chain-  
 335 ed together by the sole will of the author. However, once or

Tout au long des années de collège qui suivirent, j'étudiai. C'est-à-dire que ma mémoire enregistra des dates, des noms, des règles, des préceptes, des formules. Fidèle à l'initiation maternelle, je ne voulais retenir que les signes extérieurs des matières à étudier. Je me gardais de la vraie connaissance qui est expérience et possession. Ainsi, au sujet de Dieu, je m'accrochais de toutes mes forces de volonté aux innombrables prières récitées chaque jour, pour m'en faire un rempart contre l'ombre possible de la face nue de Dieu.

Mes notes demeuraient excellentes, et je conservais habituellement les premières places exigées par ma mère.

Je considérais la formation d'une tragédie classique ou d'une pièce de vers telle un mécanisme de principes et de recettes enchaînées par la seule volonté de l'auteur.



twice I was brushed by grace. At these times, I perceived a tragedy or poem could quite simply stand on its own internal necessity, one that was a condition for works of art.

These brief revelations would come to me painfully.

340 For a brief instant, I measured the void of my existence. I felt an inkling of utter despair. Then, hardening my will, I devoted myself to absorbing pages and pages of chemical formulae.

When the marks were read off, and above all when the prizes were handed out, I was once more struck by the impression of boundless loathing that I experienced whenever at home. A loathing I could not overcome in spite of all my efforts to do so.

In the second year of my classical studies, I stood first and was awarded a great number of prizes. My arms

Une ou deux fois, pourtant, la grâce m'effleura. J'eus la perception que la tragédie ou le poème pourraient bien ne dépendre que de leur propre fatalité intérieure, condition de l'oeuvre d'art.

Ces révélations m'atteignaient douloureusement. En une seconde, je mesurais le néant de mon existence. Je pressentais le désespoir. Alors, je me raidissais. J'absorbais des pages entières de formules chimiques.

A la lecture des notes et surtout à la distribution des prix, je retrouvais la même impression de dégoût infini que je ne parvenais pas à maîtriser malgré mes efforts.

L'année de ma rhétorique, j'arrivai premier et je remportai un très grand nombre de prix. Les bras chargés de



loaded down with book prizes, my ears humming with the polite applause of my fellow students, for whom I never stopped being an outsider, I left the stage feeling so sharp an anguish and despondency that I had difficulty moving away.

355           After the ceremony, I stretched out on my bed in the dormitory noisy with the coming and going of students making ready to leave for summer holidays.

          Suddenly, I glimpsed what my life could have been. A brutal, almost physical regret gripped me. I became depressed. Something tightened in my chest. I saw my fellow boarders  
360           hurry away, one by one or in groups. I heard them laughing and singing. Myself, I knew no joy. I could not experience joy. This was more than just being prohibited to do so. It was in the beginning a refusal, a refusal that became an impotence,  
365           a sterility. My heart was bitter and ravaged. I was just seventeen years old!

livres, les oreilles bourdonnantes des applaudissements polis des camarades pour lesquels je ne cessais pas d'être un étranger, j'allais de ma place à l'estrade et j'éprouvais une angoisse aiguë et un tel accablement que j'avais peine à avancer.

La cérémonie terminée, je m'allongeai sur mon lit, dans le dortoir bruyant du va-et-vient des élèves qui s'apprêtaient à partir pour les vacances.

Soudain, j'entrevis ce qu'aurait pu être ma vie. Un regret brutal, presque physique, m'étreignit. Je devins oppressé. Quelque chose se serrait dans ma poitrine. Je voyais s'éloigner mes camarades, un à un ou par groupes. Je les entendais rire et chanter. Moi, je ne connaissais pas la joie. Je ne pouvais pas connaître la joie. C'était plus qu'une interdiction. Ce fut d'abord un refus, cela devenait une impuissance, une stérilité. Mon cœur était amer, ravagé. J'avais dix-sept ans!





Only one boy was now left in the dormitory. He seemed to be having difficulty locking up his trunk. I was on the point of offering to help him. As I was getting up from my bed, he asked,

--"Help me a little, will you, to close this trunk?"

Surprised, annoyed at being anticipated, I pronounced distinctly, in order to recover,

--"What did you say?"

My sentence resounded in the deserted hall and had the effect of making me extremely tired. My brusque and harsh voice was always a pain to me, irritating to hear.

I stretched out again, lips squeezed shut, fists pressing against the pillow. My struggling companion repeated his sentence. I pretended not to understand, hoping he would begin a third time. I counted the seconds, full of the feeling

Un seul garçon restait maintenant dans le dortoir. Il paraissait avoir de la difficulté à boucler sa malle. Je fus sur le point de m'offrir à l'aider. Comme je me levais de mon lit, il demanda:

--"Aide-moi donc un peu à fermer ma malle?"

Surpris, mécontent d'être devancé, j'articulai pour gagner du temps:

--"Qu'est-ce que tu dis?"

Ma phrase résonna dans la salle déserte et eut pour effet de me mettre sur les dents. Ma voix brève, rauque, m'était toujours pénible, irritante à entendre.

Je m'étendis à nouveau, les lèvres serrées, pressant mon oreiller à pleines poignées. Mon compagnon répéta sa même phrase. Je fis mine de ne pas comprendre, espérant qu'il la recommencerait une troisième fois. Je comptais les secondes,





that he would not call to me again. And I did not move, aware of the voluptuousness of doing something irreparable.

385               --"Thanks for nothing! and have a good holiday,  
screwball!"

Then, this fellow I privately preferred over the others, disappeared, bent under the weight of his trunk.

390               My mother never came to fetch me at the station. Nor did she watch for me at the window. She waited for me in her own fashion, in everyday dress and in the middle of some chore or other. Upon my arrival, she would interrupt her work to ask me the few questions deemed necessary by her. Then, she would take up her chore again, only after having assigned one to me, one that would end with the next meal.

395               The very day of my return, in spite of the intense heat, I found her on her knees weeding the beets. She sat

pénétré du sentiment qu'il ne m'appellerait plus. Et je ne bougeais pas, éprouvant la volupté de faire ce qui est irréparable.

              --"Merci de ton obligeance et bonnes vacances, sacré caractère!"

Puis, ce camarade que, en secret, j'avais préféré aux autres, disparut, ployant sous le poids de sa malle.

Ma mère ne venait jamais me chercher à la gare. Elle ne me guettait pas non plus à la fenêtre. Elle m'attendait à sa façon, c'est-à-dire en robe de semaine, en plein milieu d'une tâche quelconque. A mon arrivée, elle s'interrompait pour me poser les quelques questions jugées nécessaires. Ensuite, elle reprenait son ouvrage, après m'avoir assigné ma besogne jusqu'au prochain repas.

Ce jour-là, malgré la grande chaleur, je la trouvai à genoux, en train de sarcler un carré de betteraves.



back on her heels. With a quick gesture, she pushed her straw hat to the back of her head, dried her hands on her apron, and said to me,

400                —"Well then, how many prizes?"

                  —"Six books, Mother, and I won the bursary."

                  —"Let me see!"

I handed her the books, like all book prizes red and gilt-edged. How ridiculous, how absurd they seemed to be! I  
405 was ashamed of them, and despised them. Red, gilded, phoney. Colours of a sham glory. Symbols of my false learning. Symbols of my servitude.

My mother got up and went into the house. She picked up her ring of keys, a large steel knot where all the world's  
410 keys seemed destined to keep a rendezvous with fate.

                  —"Hand over the money!"

Elle s'assit sur ses talons, fit, d'un geste brusque, basculer son chapeau de paille en arrière de sa tête, essuya ses mains à son tablier et me dit:

                  —"Eh bien, combien de prix?"

                  —"Six livres, ma mère, et j'ai gagné la bourse."

                  —"Montre!"

Je lui tendis les livres, semblables à tous les livres de prix, rouges et à tranches dorées. Qu'ils me semblaient ridicules, dérisoires! J'en avais honte, je les méprisais. Rouges, dorés, faux. Couleur de fausse gloire. Signes de ma fausse science. Signes de ma servitude.

Ma mère se leva et entra dans la maison. Elle prit son trousseau de clefs, gros noeud de ferraille où toutes les clefs du monde semblaient s'être donné rendez-vous.

                  —"Donne l'argent!"



I put my hand into my pocket and took out the money.  
She very nearly grabbed it out of my hand.

415        --"Come closer! Do you think I have time to waste!  
Change your clothes, then come help me finish the garden before  
supper!..."

I did not stir. I looked at my mother and an irremiss-  
able certitude took root in me. I realized how I hated her.

420        She locked the money up in a small desk.  
--"I am going to write to the Father Superior tomor-  
row to enroll you for next year. Fortunately, you won the  
bursary..."

425        --"I will not return to the Seminary next year," I  
announced, so clearly that I thought I heard another's voice.  
It was a man's voice.

I saw the blood rise to my mother's face and cover  
her sunburned neck and forehead. For the first time, I felt

Je mis la main à ma poche et en sortis la bourse.  
Elle me l'arracha presque.

--"Avance donc! Crois-tu que j'aie le temps de lam-  
biner! Change-toi, puis viens m'aider à finir le carré avant  
le souper!..."

Je ne bronchais pas. Je regardai ma mère et la cer-  
titude s'établissait en moi, irrémissible. Je me rendis compte  
que je la détestais.

Elle enferma l'argent dans le petit secrétaire.

--"Je vais écrire demain au directeur pour faire ton  
entrée. Heureusement que tu as eu la bourse..."

--"Je ne retournerai pas au collège, l'année pro-  
chaine, prononçai-je si nettement que je croyais entendre la  
voix d'un autre. C'était la voix d'un homme.

Je vis le sang monter au visage de ma mère, couvrir  
son front, son cou hâlés. Pour la première fois, je la sentis





her waver, hesitate. That gave me great pleasure. I repeated:

430        ---"I will not return to the Seminary. I will never  
go to the Seminary! You'd better not count on me to restore  
your reputation..."

435        My mother sprang like a tigress. Very lucidly, I  
observed the whole scene. While backing towards the door, I  
could not help noticing the supple strength of this long-limbed  
woman. Her expression in disarray, almost hideous. I was  
certain that probably one day hatred and death would disfigure  
me in the same way. I heard the clinking of the keys on their  
ring. She brandished them high in the air. I glimpsed their  
metallic flash like lightning, striking me. My mother struck  
440        me several times on the head. I lost consciousness.

When I opened my eyes again, I was alone, stretched  
out on the floor. I felt a violent pain in my head. I had be-  
come deaf.

chanceler, hésiter. Cela me faisait un extrême plaisir. Je  
répétais:

---"Je ne retournerai pas au collège. Je n'irai ja-  
mais au séminaire! Tu fais mieux de ne pas compter sur moi  
pour te redorer une réputation..."

Ma mère bondit comme une tigresse. Très lucide, j'ob-  
servais la scène. Tout en me reculant vers la porte, je ne pou-  
vais m'empêcher de noter la force souple de cette longue femme.  
Son visage était tout défait, presque hideux. Je me dis que  
c'est probablement ainsi que la haine et la mort me défigureraient,  
un jour. J'entendis tinter le trousseau de clefs. Elle  
le brandissait de haut. J'entrevis son éclat métallique comme  
celui d'un éclair s'abattant sur moi. Ma mère me frappa plu-  
sieurs fois à la tête. Je perdis connaissance.

Quand je rouvris les yeux, je me trouvais seul, étendu  
sur le plancher. Je ressentais une douleur violente à la  
tête. J'étais devenu sourd.



From that day on, a fissure opened in my oppressed  
 445 life. The heavy silence of deafness overcame me, and a prone-  
 ness to dreams, a kind of companionship, invaded my existence.  
 No voice, no noise from the exterior touched me any more. No  
 more the crash of the nearby falls, no more the song of the  
 cricket. I was certain of this. Yet I heard the Torrent  
 450 existing within me, and with it, our house and the whole of  
 our land. I did not possess the world, but this one thing  
 had changed: a part of the world possessed me. The land with  
 its water, mountains and deep caves held me in its mighty grip.

I believed myself to be rid of my mother, and I  
 455 searched out other ties with the land.

My eyes would fix upon our house. Long and low, it  
 was faced by buildings of the same dark lines, identical to the

A partir de ce jour, une fissure se fit dans ma vie  
 opprimée. Le silence lourd de la surdité m'envahit et la dis-  
 ponibilité au rêve qui se montrait une sorte d'accompagnement.  
 Aucune voix, aucun bruit extérieur n'arrivait plus jusqu'à  
 moi. Pas plus le fracas des chutes que le cri du grillon. De  
 cela, je demeurais sûr. Pourtant, j'entendais en moi le tor-  
 rent exister, notre maison aussi et tout le domaine. Je ne  
 possédais pas le monde, mais ceci se trouvait changé: une  
 partie du monde me possédait. Le domaine d'eau, de montagnes  
 et d'autres bas venait de poser sur moi sa touche souveraine.

Je me croyais défait de ma mère et je me découvrais  
 d'autres liens avec la terre.

Mes yeux s'attachaient sur notre maison, basse,  
 longue, et, lui faisant face, les bâtiments de même style



hard earth, surrounded by the sparse clearings of ploughed fields and the forest, as it unwound to the quick up and  
 460 down of the wild mountains. And over all that, there was the presence of the water: in the freshness of the air, in the species of plants, in the chorus of frogs. Brooks, the slow stream, clear or murky ponds, and very close by the house, bubbling over a precipice of rocks, the Torrent.

465           The Torrent suddenly took on the importance it must always have had in my existence. Or rather, I became conscious of its hold over me. I was struggling against its domination. It seemed that an ever present spray from the falls covered my clothes, my books, my furnishings and the walls, crusting  
 470 my daily life with an indefinable taste of water that clutched at my heart. Of all earthly sounds, my poor deaf head retained only the intermittent tumult of the cataract battering against

identifié au sol austère, les chiches éclaircies des champs cultivés, le déroulement des bois au rythme heurté des montagnes sauvages tout alentour. Et sur tout ça, la présence de l'eau. Dans la fraîcheur de l'air, les espèces des plantes, le chant des grenouilles. Ruisseaux, rivière molle, étangs clairs ou figés et, tout près de la maison, bouillonnant dans un précipice de rochers: le torrent.

Le torrent prit soudain l'importance qu'il aurait toujours dû avoir dans mon existence. Ou plutôt je devins conscient de son emprise sur moi. Je me débattais contre sa domination. Il me semblait que sur mes vêtements, mes livres, les meubles, les murs, un embrun continu montait des chutes et patinait ma vie quotidienne d'un goût d'eau indéfinissable qui me serrait le cœur. De toutes les sonorités terrestres, ma pauvre tête de sourd ne gardait que le tumulte intermittent de





my temples. My blood flowed to the precipitated rhythm of the surging water. Whenever I became more or less calm, I did not suffer much, the din of the water reducing itself to a faraway  
 475 murmur. But on the frightful days when I remembered my revolt, I felt the Torrent inside my head to be so strong against the brain that, my mother battering me with her ring of keys could not have delivered harder blows.

480 This woman did not address a single word to me since the notorious scene when, for the first time, I had opposed myself to her will. I felt she was avoiding me. The summer work followed its course. I contrived to be alone. Abandoning the mower, forgetting the hay, the fruit, the vegetables,  
 485 my soul let itself be taken over by the spirit of the land. I stayed hours contemplating an insect or watching the shadows move across the leaves. And also, long days evoking the dif-

la cataracte battant mes tempes. Mon sang coulait selon le rythme précipité de l'eau houleuse. Lorsque je devenais à peu près calme, cela ne me faisait pas trop souffrir, cela se réduisait à un murmure lointain. Mais, les jours épouvantables où je ressassais ma révolte, je percevais le torrent si fort à l'intérieur de mon crâne, contre mon cerveau, que ma mère me frappant avec son trousseau de clefs ne m'avait pas fait plus mal.

Cette femme ne m'adressa plus un mot depuis la fameuse scène où, pour la première fois, je m'étais opposé à sa volonté. Je sentais qu'elle m'évitait. Les travaux d'été suivaient leur cours. Je m'arrangeais pour me trouver seul. Et, délaissant foin, faucheuse, légumes, fruits, mon âme se laissait gagner par l'esprit du domaine. Je restais des heures à contempler un insecte, ou l'avance de l'ombre sur les feuilles. Des journées entières aussi à évoquer certaines fois,





ferent times, even the most remote, my mother had mistreated me. Each detail remained with me in the present. None of her  
 490 words or blows would flow from my memory.

It was around this time that Perceval arrived on the scene. This horse, almost wild, would not let himself be broken by big Claudine who had broken many others. He resisted her with an audacity, a perseverance and a trickery that en-  
 495 charmed me. Completely black, his nostrils always flaring, his body lathered with sweat, this simmering beast resembled the being of fire and passion that I would have liked to be. I envied it. I would have liked to consult with it. To live in the immediate surroundings of this never daunted fury,  
 500 seemed to be an honour, an enrichment.

At night, I would get up once my mother was asleep, and go and perch myself in the hayloft above Perceval. I was

même les plus éloignées, où ma mère m'avait maltraité. Chaque détail restait présent. Rien ne s'écoulait de ses paroles et de ses coups.

C'est vers ce temps que Perceval fit son arrivée chez nous. Ce cheval, quasi sauvage, ne se laissait pas mater par la grande Claudine qui en avait dompté bien d'autres. Il lui résistait avec une audace, une persévérance, une rouerie qui m'encharmaient. Toute noire, sans cesse les naseaux fumants, l'écume sur le corps, cette bête frémissante ressemblait à l'être de fougue et de passion que j'aurais voulu incarner. Je l'enviais. J'aurais voulu la consulter. Vivre dans l'entourage immédiat de cette fureur jamais démentie me semblait un honneur, un enrichissement.

Le soir, je me relevais, une fois ma mère endormie, et j'allais me percher dans le fenil au-dessus de Perceval.



astonished and delighted to notice no relaxing whatsoever of his furious rage. Was it out of pride that the beast seemed  
 505 to be waiting for my departure before falling asleep? Did my un-  
 moving and hidden presence irritate it? It did not cease its noisy breathing, nor its kicking in the stall. From my look-out I could see its beautiful black dress with its glints of blue. Currents of electricity ran up and down its backbone.  
 510 I could never have imagined an equal feast of delight. I relished the real, physical presence of passion.

I left the stable, my head and ears throbbing in an uproar that drove me almost mad. Always this crash of water and storm. I held my hands to my temples, and the shocks fol-  
 515 lowed each other so rapidly that I feared I was about to die. I promised I would not stay so long the next time; but the show of Perceval's temper so attracted me that I decided to

Je me délectais, je m'étonnais de ne jamais percevoir de détente au paroxysme de son emportement. Était-ce par orgueil que la bête attendait mon départ pour s'endormir? Ou ma présence immobile et cachée l'irritait-elle? Elle ne cessait pas de souffler bruyamment, de donner des coups de sabots dans sa stalle. De mon abri je voyais la belle robe noire aux reflets bleus. Des courants électriques parcouraient son épine dorsale. Je n'avais jamais pu imaginer pareille fête. Je goûtais à la présence réelle, physique, de la passion.

Je quittais l'écurie, la tête et les oreilles battant d'un vacarme qui me rendait presque fou. Toujours ce ressac d'eau et d'orage. Je me prenais le front à deux mains et les chocs se précipitaient à une telle allure que j'avais peur de mourir. Je me promettais de ne pas rester si longtemps la prochaine fois, mais le spectacle de la colère de Perceval m'attirait à un tel point que je ne me décidais à m'éloigner



move away whenever the crash of the Torrent inside seized me, demanding all my attention.

520 I went down then, to the falls. I could not choose not to go there. I went toward the movement of the water; to it I brought its singing sound as if I were its one and only trustee. In return, the water showed me its giddy swirl, its mist, those things that were the necessary complement to  
525 the pounding against my temples. This pounding was not simply one great cadence bringing with it the whole mass of the water, but a performance of several exasperated struggles, of several inner currents and swirls, fighting each other ferociously.

The water had hollowed out the rock. I knew that  
530 the spot where I stood extended over the water like a terrace. I pictured the cove underneath, dark, opaque, fringed with mist. False peace. Black depth. Reserve of terror.

que lorsque le fracas du torrent en moi me saisissait et m'interdisait toute autre attention.

Je descendais alors au bord des chutes. Je n'étais pas libre de n'y pas descendre. J'allais vers le mouvement de l'eau, je lui apportais son chant, comme si j'en étais devenu l'unique dépositaire. En échange, l'eau me montrait ses tournolements, son écume, tels des compléments nécessaires aux coups heurtant mon front. Non une seule grande cadence entraînant toute la masse d'eau, mais le spectacle de plusieurs luttes exaspérées, de plusieurs courants et remous intérieurs se combattant féroce-ment.

L'eau avait creusé le rocher. Je savais que l'endroit où je me trouvais avançait sur l'eau comme une terrasse. Je m'imaginais la crique au-dessous, sombre, opaque, frangée d'écume. Fausse paix, profondeur noire. Réserve d'effroi.







Water filtered up here and there through the ground. The rock was muddy. It would have been easy to slip off. A  
 535 fall of a few hundred feet! What food for the abyss that surely decapitated and dismembered its prey! Tearing them up...

I returned to my pallet on the floor, without separating from the Torrent. While falling asleep, I added the image of its feverish tumult to its roar, already an integral part  
 540 of me. Elements of a dream or of deliberate contrivance? I felt that soon I would see the shape of the monstrous visage of either one emerge from my torment.

The beginning of the term at the Seminary was approaching. My mother had steeled herself, and waited for that moment  
 545 for an about-face; the whole of her strength gathered and increased by her long and apparent resignation that, in reality, was only a victory over her own petulance. Oh! not one single

Des sources filtraient par endroits. Le rocher était limoneux. C'eût été facile de glisser. Quel saut de plusieurs centaines de pieds! Quelle pâture pour le gouffre qui devait décapiter et démembrer ses proies! Les déchiqueter...

Je reprenais le chemin de ma paillasse à même le plancher, sans m'être séparé du torrent. En m'endormant, j'ajoutais à son mugissement, déjà intégré à moi, l'image de son impétueuse fièvre. Eléments d'un songe ou d'une oeuvre? Je sentais que bientôt de l'un ou de l'autre je verrais le visage formé et monstrueux émerger de mon tourment.

Le jour de la rentrée approchait. Ma mère s'était raidie et n'attendait que le moment de faire volte-face, toute sa vigueur ramassée et accrue par cette longue et apparente démission qui n'était en réalité qu'un gain remporté sur sa vivacité. Oh! pas une de mes minutes de paresse devant le travail,



minute of my idleness during chores, not a single stroll alongside the falls or elsewhere remained unknown to her.

550 I guessed her to be in full possession of her power. Strangely enough, the continual failure she experienced in the breaking of Perceval did not seem to affect her. She rose above everything, sure of her final triumph. This made me shrink back. And I knew that soon it would be useless to try  
555 avoiding a confrontation with the giant-like Claudine Perrault.

I turned to Perceval.

That evening, the animal was out of its stall. After entering the stable, I was almost persuaded to leave it again. The horse was in such a fury that I feared his kicking about  
560 would bring everything down. Once under cover in the hayloft, I contemplated this astonishing rage. The blood on its coat ran with sweat. The beast was cruelly hobbled; however, this did not stop it from fighting.

ni une seule de mes flâneries au bord des chutes ou ailleurs ne lui demeuraient inconnues.

Je la devinais en pleine possession de son pouvoir. Chose étrange, les continuels échecs qu'elle rencontrait dans le dressage de Perceval ne semblaient pas l'atteindre. Elle s'élevait au-dessus de tout, sûre de son triomphe final. Cela me rapetissait. Et je savais que bientôt ce serait inutile d'essayer d'éviter la confrontation avec la gigantesque Claudine Perrault.

Je me tournai vers Perceval.

Ce soir-là, la bête était déchaînée. En entrant dans l'écurie, je fus sur le point de retourner en arrière. Le cheval se démenait si fort que je craignais qu'il ne défonçât tout. Une fois à l'abri dans le fenil, je contemplai cette rage étonnante. Le sang sur son poil se mêlait à la sueur. Il était cruellement entravé, pourtant, et cela ne l'empêchait pas de se débattre.



I thought my first feelings were pity, seeing such  
 565 a superb creature tortured and wounded. I did not realize that  
 in fact, it was unbearable to observe a hatred so ripe and  
 ready fettered and held back; while within me, I felt my own  
 to be inferior and cowardly.

This captured demon with such complete strength, daz-  
 570 zled me. I owed it, in homage and justice also, a chance to  
 be itself, at large in the world. To what evil did I wish to  
 restore freedom? Was it in me?

The Torrent suddenly boomed with such force in my  
 head that terror gripped me. I wanted to cry out. I could  
 575 not retreat any further. I remember having been stunned by  
 this mass of sound battering my head.

Then, at this point, there is a blank that from that  
 time on, struggles for illumination. And when I feel the

Je crus mon premier sentiment fait de pitié en voyant  
 une superbe créature blessée et torturée. Je ne me rendais pas  
 compte que cela surtout m'était insupportable de constater une  
 haine aussi mûre et à point, liée et retenue, alors qu'en moi  
 je sentais la mienne inférieure et lâche.

Ce démon captif, en pleine puissance, m'ébouissait.  
 Je lui devais en hommage et en justice aussi de lui permettre  
 d'être soi dans le monde. A quel mal voulais-je rendre la li-  
 berté? Était-il en moi?

Le torrent subitement gronda avec tant de force sous  
 mon crâne que l'épouvante me saisit. Je voulus crier. Je ne  
 pouvais plus reculer. Je me souviens d'avoir été étourdi par  
 cette masse sonore qui me frappait à la tête.

Puis, il y a là un manque que je me harcèle à éclair-  
 cir, depuis ce temps. Et lorsque je sens l'approche possible





possibility of that horrible illumination approaching my memory, I fight and cling desperately to darkness, though it be  
 580 more troubling and threatening. An inhuman circle, the circle of my incessant thoughts, the matter of my external existence.

The Torrent overcame me, shook me from head to foot, broke over me in a storm that almost disjointed me.

585 Impression of an abyss, an abyss of time and space where I was rolled in emptiness following the storm. The limits of this dead space are crossed. I open my eyes to the bright morning. I am face to face with the morning. I can only see the sky that blinds me. I cannot move. What struggle  
 590 has exhausted me this way? A struggle against the water? This is impossible. And besides, my clothes are dry. From what maelstrom am I castaway? I turn my head painfully. I am lying on the rock, just beside the Torrent. I see its

de l'horrible lumière dans ma mémoire, je me débats et je m'accroche désespérément à l'obscurité, si troublée et menacée qu'elle soit. Cercle inhumain, cercle de mes pensées incessantes, matière de ma vie éternelle.

Le torrent me subjuguait, me secouait de la tête aux pieds, me brisa dans un remous qui faillit me désarticuler.

Impression d'un abîme, d'un abîme d'espace et de temps où je fus roulé dans un vide succédant à la tempête. La limite de cet espace mort est franchie. J'ouvre les yeux sur un matin lumineux. Je suis face à face avec le matin. Je ne vois que le ciel qui m'aveugle. Je ne puis faire un mouvement. Quelle lutte m'a donc épuisé de la sorte? Lutte contre l'eau? C'est impossible. Et d'ailleurs, mes vêtements sont secs. De quel gouffre suis-je le naufragé? Je tourne ma tête avec peine. Je suis couché sur le roc, tout au bord du torrent. Je vois





foam fuse into yellow spray. Could it be that I have returned  
 595 from the Torrent? Ah! what an atrocious fight has bruised me!  
 Have I wrestled hand to hand with the Angel? I do not want to  
 know. I fight back awareness with tearing gestures.

The beast has been delivered. It has galloped off  
 into a world about to be terror stricken. Woe betide the one  
 600 who finds himself in its way. Oh! I see my mother on the  
 ground. I look at her. I measure her fallen span. She was  
 immense, stained with blood, marked with encrusted hoofprints.

sa mousse qui fuse en gerbes jaunes. Se peut-il que je re-  
 vienne du torrent? Ah! quel combat atroce m'a meurtri? Ai-je  
 combattu corps à corps avec l'Ange? Je voudrais ne pas savoir.  
 Je repousse la conscience avec des gestes déchirants.

La bête a été délivrée. Elle a pris son galop ef-  
 froyable dans le monde. Malheur à qui s'est trouvé sur son  
 passage. Oh! je vois ma mère renversée. Je la regarde. Je  
 mesure son envergure terrassée. Elle était immense, marquée  
 de sang et d'empreintes incrustées.



## II

I have no point of reference. No clock measures my hours. No calendar counts my years. I am dissolved in time. Rules, discipline, rigid regulation, all have been overturned. The name of God is dry and crumbles away. No God will ever  
5 reside in that name for me. I have known only empty signs and symbols. Too long have I worn my chains. Time enough for them to grow roots to the inside. They have defeated me from within. I will never be a free man. I wanted to free myself too late.

10 I walk among the wreckage. A dead man among debris. Only anguish distinguishes me from dead symbols.

Nothing is alive except the landscape around me. It is not a question of loving or aesthetic contemplation. No, it

## II

Je n'ai pas de point de repère. Aucune horloge ne marque mes heures. Aucun calendrier ne compte mes années. Je suis dissous dans le temps. Règlements, discipline, entraves rigides, tout est par terre. Le nom de Dieu est sec et s'effrite. Aucun Dieu n'habita jamais ce nom pour moi. Je n'ai connu que des signes vides. J'ai porté trop longtemps mes chaînes. Elles ont eu le loisir de pousser des racines intérieures. Elles m'ont défait par le dedans. Je ne serai jamais un homme libre. J'ai voulu m'affranchir trop tard.

Je marche sur des débris. Un mort parmi les débris. L'angoisse seule me distingue des signes morts.

Il n'y a de vivant que le paysage autour de moi. Il ne s'agit pas de la contemplation aimante ou esthétique. Non,



is more profound than this, more involved; I am identified  
 15 with the landscape. Delivered up to nature. I feel myself  
 becoming a tree or a clod of earth. The only thing that se-  
 parates me from the tree or from the clod is anguish. I am  
 as porous to anguish as the earth is to rain.

The rain, the wind, clover, leaves have become ele-  
 20 ments of my life, real parts of my body. I am more of them  
 than of myself. Yet terror is skin deep. I pretend to ignore  
 it. But at times, it makes me distinguish my arm from the  
 grass it cuts. If my arm trembles, it is because fear suddenly  
 makes it tremble. The grass itself is not subject to fear,  
 25 but only to the wind. I give myself up to the wind in vain,  
 fear alone shakes and tosses me.

I am not yet ripe for the ultimate flight, the ulti-  
 mate resignation to the cosmic forces. I do not yet have the

c'est plus profond, plus engagé; je suis identifié au paysage.  
 Livré à la nature. Je me sens devenir un arbre ou une motte  
 de terre. La seule chose qui me sépare de l'arbre ou de la  
 motte, c'est l'angoisse. Je suis poreux sous l'angoisse comme  
 la terre sous la pluie.

La pluie, le vent, le trèfle, les feuilles sont de-  
 venus des éléments de ma vie. Des membres réels de mon corps.  
 Je participe d'eux plus que de moi-même. La terreur, pourtant,  
 est à fleur de peau. Je feins de ne pas y croire. Mais, par-  
 fois, elle me fait discerner mon bras de l'herbe qu'il fauche.  
 Si mon bras tremble, c'est parce que la peur le fait soudain  
 trembler. L'herbe, elle, ne dépend pas de la peur, mais seule-  
 ment du vent. J'ai beau m'abandonner au vent, la peur, seule,  
 me balance et m'agite.

Je ne suis pas encore mûr pour l'ultime fuite, l'ul-  
 time démission aux forces cosmiques. Je n'ai pas encore le





true right to say to the tree: "Brother," and to the falls:

30 "Here I am!"

What is the present? I feel the warm and tardy freshness of the March sun on my hands. I believe in the present. Then, I lift my eyes and glimpse the open door of the stable. I am aware of the blood, of a woman's body stretched  
35 out, the stigmata of death and fury on her. This is as present to my vision as the March sun. As true as first sight some fifteen or twenty years ago. This crowded image rots the sun on my hands. The limpid touch of the light is forever spoiled for me.

40 I go back to the house. Terror alone differentiates my muddy steps from the mud of the path to the house.

In an old pine tree, the oldest and the highest, a blackbird must be singing its return from the south. I perceive

droit permanent de dire à l'arbre: "Mon frère," et aux chutes: "Me voici!"

Qu'est-ce que le présent? Je sens sur mes mains la fraîcheur tiède, attardée, du soleil de mars. Je crois au présent. Puis, je lève les yeux, j'aperçois la porte ouverte de l'étable. Je sais le sang, là, une femme étendue et les stigmates de la mort et de la rage sur elle. C'est aussi présent à mon regard que le soleil de mars. Aussi vrai que la première vision d'il y a quinze ou vingt ans. Cette image dense me pourrit le soleil sur les mains. La touche limpide de la lumière est gâtée à jamais pour moi.

Je rentre. L'effroi seul différencie mes pas boueux de la boue du sentier menant jusqu'à la maison

Dans le vieux pin, le plus vieux et le plus haut, une corneille doit chanter son retour du sud. Je ne perçois que



only its contortions. I have lost sound and song. Words no  
 45 longer exist. They have become a silent grimace.

The Torrent is silent with the heavy silence that  
 precedes the spring break-up. My head is silence. I analyse  
 scraps of memory. I reconstruct my misfortune. I complete  
 it. I illuminate it. I take it up once more where I had  
 50 left it. My investigation is lucid and methodical. It cor-  
 roborates little by little what my imagination or my instinct  
 let me assume.

I admire my detachment; it surprises me. Then, imme-  
 diately, I feel that I am my own dupe. I think that I am with-  
 55 out pity, and I attenuate, I bifurcate, in order to escape  
 reality. I lie! What good is it to keep on? What good is  
 it to lie? An innate truth lays all its weight on me. It  
 corrupts every one of my simplest gestures. I possess this  
 truth and by it I recognize that none of my gestures is pure.

ses contorsions. J'ai perdu le son et le chant. La parole  
 n'existe plus. Elle est devenue grimace muette.

Le torrent est silencieux. Du silence lourd qui pré-  
 cède la crue du printemps. Ma tête est silence. J'analyse des  
 bribes. Je refais mon malheur. Je le complète. Je l'éclaire.  
 Je le reprends là où je l'avais laissé. Mon investigation est  
 lucide et méthodique. Elle corrobore peu à peu ce que mon ima-  
 gination ou mon instinct me laissent supposer.

J'admire mon détachement qui m'étonne. Puis, tout à  
 coup, je sens que je me dupe. Je crois être sans pitié, et  
 j'édulcore, je bifurque pour échapper à la réalité. Je mens!  
 A quoi bon chercher? A quoi bon mentir? La vérité infuse pèse  
 de tout son poids en moi. Elle corrompt chacun de mes gestes  
 les plus simples. Je possède la vérité et je la reconnais à  
 cela qu'aucun de mes gestes n'est pur.



60                   I have not known so much calmness since I know not when... That worries me. With what volume then, will the next inner tumult be reinforced? Ah! why is my night troubled by this deficiency? Does it bring comfort? I do not believe in the sweetness of comfort.

65                   Desire for woman has caught up with me in this desert. No, this is no comfort. It is merciless, like everything that overtakes me. To possess and to destroy the body and soul of a woman. And to see this woman play her role in my very own destruction. To go and seek her out is to give her this right.

70                   I went out to meet her. I took up a second time, my childhood journey to the highway. That voyage of innocence, when I sought to find some fraternal being, one that was refused to me.

Je n'ai pas ressenti autant de calme, depuis je ne sais plus quand... Cela m'inquiète. De quelle ampleur sera donc renforcé le prochain tumulte intérieur? Ah! que vient faire ce manque dans ma nuit? Apporte-t-il une douceur? Je ne crois pas à la douceur.

Le désir de la femme m'a rejoint dans le désert. Non, ce n'est pas une douceur. C'est impitoyable, comme tout ce qui m'atteint. Posséder et détruire le corps et l'âme d'une femme. Et voir cette femme tenir son rôle dans ma propre destruction. Aller la chercher, c'est lui donner ce droit.

Je suis parti à sa rencontre. J'ai repris le trajet de mon enfance, vers la grand'route. Ce trajet de quand j'étais innocent et que je cherchais un être fraternel, qui me fut refusé.





After so many years, I rise again to the surface of  
 75 my solitude. I emerge from the depth of an opaque pond. I  
 wait for a lure. Today I know there is a trap. But I myself  
 will spring it and I will taste the fresh food of flesh.

The peddlers' odds and ends are parked on my land by  
 the side of the highway. There are two persons, formless,  
 80 draped and hooded, standing like grey trees. Their red hands  
 raised over a small fire of twigs. Their hands, unmoving in  
 the air, over the fire, as if blessing it, endlessly.

I feel my hard muscles and the sturdy breathing of  
 my chest. Finally I am going to be able to measure my strength  
 85 by chasing away these intruders! With a glance I notice they  
 have cut some firewood. They are camping on my property! They  
 see me coming and like impassive dolmens, they do not move!  
 O anger, assemble your unquestionable forces!

Après tant d'années, de nouveau je remonte à la sur-  
 face de ma solitude. J'émerge du fond d'un étang opaque. Je  
 guette l'appât. Aujourd'hui, je sais que c'est un piège. Mais,  
 moi aussi, je le briserai et j'aurai goûté à la chair fraîche  
 en pâture.

Le bric-à-brac des colporteurs est installé sur ma  
 terre, au bord de la route. Il y a là deux personnages sans  
 forme, drapés, encapuchonnés, debout, tels des arbres gris.  
 Leurs mains colorées, élevés vers un petit feu de branchages.  
 Leurs mains immobiles dans l'air, au-dessus du feu, ainsi que  
 pour bénir le feu sans fin.

Je sens mes muscles durs et le souffle robuste de ma  
 poitrine. Je vais, enfin, pouvoir mesurer ma force en chassant  
 ces intrus! D'un coup d'oeil je constate qu'ils ont coupé du  
 petit bois. Ils campent chez moi! Ils me voient venir et ne  
 bougent pas, semblables à des dolmens impassibles! O ma colère,  
 assemble tes puissances certaines!





I challenge these people. No reaction at all on  
 90 their part. For all the time I have not spoken to anyone,  
 what if I no longer knew how to speak? I cry out, I yell. I  
 do not know what words escape my throat. Do they correspond  
 to my thoughts? I do not know. Anyway, I go up to these dol-  
 mens. There is a movement under their mantles. Hands leave  
 95 the fire. One of the two shades comes towards me. It is a  
 man, middle-aged, greying, sly looking. His bizarre and arti-  
 ficially solemn attire makes him look quite ridiculous.

My fists are tight. The man is bowing obsequiously.  
 He talks without stopping. But his babbling is lost on me. I  
 100 knock him flat with a single blow. He went off the end of my  
 arm just like a ball. I laugh. My laugh must have a sound.  
 I do not hear it.

The man gets up, his cape spotted with mud and melt-  
 ing snow. He multiplies his gestures of greeting and his

J'interpelle ces gens. Aucune réaction quelconque  
 de leur part. Depuis le temps que je n'ai adressé la parole  
 à qui que ce soit, si je ne savais plus parler? Je crie, je  
 hurle. Je ne sais quels mots s'échappent de mon gosier. Cor-  
 respondent-ils à ma pensée? Je ne sais. En tout cas, j'ai  
 atteint les dolmens. Il y a du remous sous les mantes. Les  
 mains laissent le feu. Une des deux ombres s'approche de moi.  
 C'est un homme assez mûr, grissonnant, l'air chafouin. Son  
 accoutrement bizarre et faussement solennel le ridiculise assez  
 bien.

Mes poings sont tendus. L'homme se confond en révé-  
 rences. Il parle sans arrêt. Mais son babillage se trouve  
 perdu pour moi. Je l'étends à terre d'un seul coup. Il est  
 parti au bout de mon bras comme une balle. Je ris. Mon rire  
 doit avoir un son. Je ne le connais pas.

L'homme se relève, sa cape maculée de boue et de  
 neige fondante. Il multiplie les saluts et les protestations



105 protesting excuses. He seems to be offering me his merchandise  
 as redress. From his small wagon he gathers up an armful of  
 necklaces, rosaries, calendars, knives, etc.... He puts the  
 whole load into my arms, accompanying his gesture with a  
 mimickry of affliction, more because of his bleeding mouth  
 110 than out of regret. This whole scene seemed to equal for me,  
 one clear message that went more or less like this: "Choose!  
 Take everything you want, but for God's sake don't hit me  
 again! I'm going to leave your property as soon as possible...  
 just give me the time to put my things together..."

115 I place all the different objects on the ground, keep-  
 ing only a glassbead neckalce that pleases me for its obvious  
 crassness. I look at the man. He makes a sign telling me to  
 keep the jewellery. Happy to be getting off so lightly, he  
 would smile if not for his aching jaw that prevents his lips

d'excuses. Il paraît me proposer sa marchandise, en réparation.  
 Il ramasse dans sa voiturette une brassée de colliers, de cha-  
 pelets, d'almanachs, de couteaux, etc.... Il me met cette  
 charge dans les bras, accompagnant son geste d'une mimique af-  
 fligée, plus à la vérité par sa joue qui saigne, que par le  
 regret. Toute cette mise en scène équivaut pour moi à une  
 phrase claire, à peu près du genre de celle-ci: "Choisis!  
 Prends tout ce que tu voudras, mais ne me touche plus, de grâce!  
 Je vais quitter ta propriété aussitôt que possible... Laisse-  
 moi seulement réunir mes affaires..."

Je dépose à terre tous les objets disparates et ne  
 conserve qu'un collier de verroterie qui me plaît par sa vul-  
 garité naïve. Je regarde l'homme. Il me fait signe de conser-  
 ver le bijou. Heureux de s'en tirer à si bon compte, il sou-  
 rirait, si ce n'était de sa joue qui le force à se pincer les



120 from moving. I offer him money; he refuses shaking his head  
with a gloomy look.

I go nearer still. I am right up beside the shade  
still crouching by the fire; a hood covers its eyes. I lift  
this shade up to me, solidly, by the shoulders. It is a wo-  
125 man. She laughs. Her face is turned up towards me. I lose  
some of my assurance. I back off a little. She laughs. The  
man also tries to smile. They seem to be mocking me. As a  
kind of counterstroke, I go up to the woman, so close that her  
breath is on my neck. I snatch off her cloak. I would like  
130 to tear off all her cheap clothing, just as I would strip a  
white birch. She does not try to back away from me... She  
keeps breathing on my neck. She laughs in my neck. Her  
dazzling teeth snap at me. I feel her heart beating, accele-  
rated somewhat by the laugh I do not hear. She holds her

lèvres. Je lui offre de l'argent, il refuse en secouant la  
tête, d'un air rembruni.

J'avance toujours. Je suis tout à côté de la seconde  
ombre accroupie près du feu, le capuchon sur les yeux. Je sou-  
lève cette ombre jusqu'à moi, solidement, par les épaules.  
C'est une femme. Elle rit. Son visage est levé vers moi. Je  
perds de mon assurance. Je m'éloigne un peu. Elle rit. L'hom-  
me aussi essaie de sourire. Ils ont l'air de se moquer de moi.  
En guise de riposte, je me rapproche de la femme, si près  
qu'elle me respire dans le cou. Je lui arrache son manteau.  
Je voudrais lui déchirer tous ces oripeaux qui la couvrent, à  
la façon dont je sais décortiquer un bouleau blanc. Elle ne  
tente pas de s'écarter de moi... Elle me souffle toujours dans  
le cou. Elle rit dans mon cou. Ses dents éblouissantes me  
narguent. Je sens son coeur battre, à peine essoufflé par ce  
rire que je n'entends pas. Elle tient ses bras levés en arc,







135 arms up in an arc behind her head, hands on the nape of her neck as if they were hiding something.

Did I really speak, or did I think to myself that I did? I wanted to know what she was covering up in this way. Without moving from me, she takes off the loose neckerchief her hands were tying over her heavy hair. Her hair falls down over her shoulders. I back away a bit. Her hair is black and very long. A mass of almost blue hair. I back off a bit further still. It is she who keeps walking towards me. Her eyes are sea-green. Her high black eyebrows outline a perfect setting for the pupils of her eyes.

I turn about and call out to the man who has followed the whole scene with a bored look:

--"She yours?"

He shrugs his shoulders.

au-dessus de sa tête, les mains sur sa nuque, semblant cacher quelque chose.

Ai-je vraiment parlé, ou me suis-je simplement fait cette réflexion en moi-même? Je voulais savoir ce qu'elle dissimulait ainsi. Sans se retirer de moi, elle enlève le fichu branlant que ses mains renouaient sur les lourds cheveux. Ils s'échappent, libres, sur ses épaules. Je recule. Ils sont noirs et très longs. Une masse de cheveux presque bleus. Je recule encore. C'est elle qui marche sur moi. Ses yeux sont pers. Ses noirs sourcils, placés haut, soulignent l'enchâssement parfait des prunelles.

Je fais volte-face et je crie au bonhomme qui a suivi la scène, la mine ennuyée:

--"C'est ta fille?"

Il hausse les épaules.



150

With gesture and words, I explain that in the whole of his bazaar, only the girl interests me, and that if he does not consent to give her to me, I will smash his face in. She laughs less strongly, still against me. I feel the heat of her breath on my chest. She has lowered her head a bit. I breathe in her smell.

155

The man seems dismayed. I throw him fistfuls of money. (I do not understand why I have all this money in my pockets.) The man gathers up the bills and coins scattered here and there on the ground, leaping madly. He rolls his eyes in ecstasy. He thanks me, bowing and scraping.

160

Then I end the peddler's show of thanks by signaling him to put out the fire and to move on with his rig. He bustles about. Once everything is piled away in the handcart, the man hesitates. The woman goes over to her partner and

Par gestes et paroles, j'explique que seule la fille me tente dans tout le bazar et que, si le marchand ne consent pas à me la céder, je lui casse la figure. Elle rit plus doux, tout contre moi. Je sens la chaleur de son haleine sur ma poitrine. Elle a baissé un peu la tête. Je respire son odeur.

L'homme paraît consterné. Je lui jette des poignées d'argent. (Je ne comprends pas que j'aie tout cet argent dans les poches.) L'homme recueille les billets et les pièces, de-ci, de-là, par petits bonds affolés. Il roule des yeux extasiés. Il me remercie jusqu'à terre.

Puis je mets fin aux démonstrations du vagabond, en lui signifiant d'éteindre le feu et de déguerpir avec ses nippes. Il s'affaire. Maintenant que tout est empilé dans la voiturette à bras, l'homme hésite. La femme va vers son comparse



165 speaks to him. He listens, nodding his head. Then, she comes back to me. By her look, I know that I have won my prize.

The role of solitude is reversed. It now weighs down on the peddler's shoulders. My companion and I form a couple. A man takes to the emptiness alone. And it is not me.

170 The woman put on her hooded cloak again, after having first fetched a small bundle of clothes from the cart. Her look is inscrutable. I notice her mouth at rest. It is full and fleshy, now taking the place of her laugh without destroying its flavour inside of me.

175 And behold, I give her a name, I, the wild one, feel a woman's name come to my lips as an offering. I who never received anything, relish the miracle of my first giving. I call her Amica. She probably has another name, but I will never

et lui parle. Il écoute en branlant la tête. Puis, elle revient à moi. A son attitude, je comprends que j'ai gagné ma proie.

Le rôle de la solitude est renversé. Elle pèse à présent sur les épaules du colporteur. Je forme un couple avec ma compagne. L'homme seul reprend le large. Et ce n'est pas moi.

La femme a remis son espèce de burnous après avoir été chercher un petit paquet de linge dans la charrette. Son visage est fermé. Je remarque sa bouche au repos; épanouie et charnue, elle remplace la saveur de son rire sans l'effacer en moi.

Et voilà que je lui donne un nom. Moi, l'homme sauvage, je sens monter à mes lèvres un nom de femme, tel un don à offrir. Moi, qui n'a jamais rien reçu, je goûte à ce miracle du premier don. Je l'appelle Amica. Elle a probablement un autre prénom, mais en aucun temps je ne l'entendrai prononcer,





hear it spoken; but I have heard her new one for the first  
 180 time. I felt it grow within me and spout forth for her to  
 receive. She has taken it, for she has become mine; and so,  
 I possess the right to name her.

I waited for a long time after the man had disappear-  
 ed on the highway, pushing his jolting cart. Afterwards, I  
 185 led Amica through a labyrinth of detours in the mountains, in  
 order to confuse forever her memory of the way home.

I imagine she is asking all sorts of questions, like:  
 "Where you taking me?" "Is it further yet?" "You going to keep  
 me long?" "Do you like me that much?" "Is the necklace for me?"

190 Nothing. She does not open her mouth, now become a  
 sulky pout.

She walks alongside of me, hidden again under the  
 hood. Her eyes are watchful. At times, she gives me a piercing  
 look that breaks up her passive expression, and startles me.

et celui-là je viens de l'entendre pour la première fois. Je  
 l'ai entendu s'assembler en moi et jaillir hors de moi pour  
 qu'elle le prenne. Elle l'a pris, car elle est devenue mienne  
 et j'ai acquis le droit de la désigner.

J'ai attendu longtemps après que l'homme fût disparu  
 sur la route, cahin-caha, poussant sa voiture. Ensuite, j'ai  
 fait faire à Amica un lot de détours dans la montagne, afin de  
 brouiller à jamais dans sa mémoire le chemin conduisant à mon  
 domaine.

J' imagine qu'elle me pose toutes sortes de questions,  
 comme: "Où me mènes-tu?" "C'est loin, encore?" "Tu me gar-  
 deras longtemps?" "Je te plais, tant que ça?" "C'est pour moi  
 le collier?"

Rien. Elle n'ouvre pas la bouche qui a pris une moue  
 boudeuse.

Elle marche à mes côtés, à nouveau enfouie sous son  
 capuchon. Ses yeux veillent. Parfois, elle me jette un regard  
 perçant qui rompt son expression passive et me fait tressaillir.



195 Too late. I am already hooked. I do not awaken from some dream; on the contrary, from the moment I saw this woman, what attracted me above all in her, is precisely an indescribable kind of slyness and evil in her eye.

I keep going forward. I do not retrace my steps.

200 I will go right to the end, right to the fullness of this evil that at present truly belongs to me, and that I did not know about this very morning. Moreover, I will feed on her face when we are in sight of the house and the Torrent. At the moment she realizes that miles and miles separate us from any  
205 neighbour. I will introduce her to the Torrent. I will acquaint her with the face of my solitude. She will see that, of the two, I am the one to be the more feared, and she will tremble... I will feel her quiver against me, my hands on her throat, her eyes begging...

Trop tard. Je suis déjà lié. Je ne m'éveille pas d'une illusion; au contraire, dès que j'ai vu cette femme, ce qui m'a attiré plus que toute autre chose en elle, c'est justement ce je ne sais quoi de sournois et de mauvais dans l'oeil.

J'avance toujours. Je ne rebrousse pas chemin. J'irai jusqu'au bout, jusqu'à la plénitude de ce mal qui m'appartient bien en propre, à présent, et que j'ignorais encore ce matin. Et puis, je vais me repaître de sa figure quand nous serons en vue de la maison et du torrent. Quand elle se rendra compte que des milles et des milles nous séparent de tout voisin. Je lui ferai part du torrent. Je l'initierai aux yeux de ma solitude. Elle verra que je suis le plus à craindre des deux et frissonnera... Je la sentirai frissonner contre moi. Mes mains sur sa gorge. Ses yeux suppliants...



210 I observe, I spy on her countenance. For the second  
time, I have turned back her hood without her protesting; nor  
does she come out of her apparent apathy. We enter the house.  
I closed the door behind us. Not a muscle of her face moves.  
The house is sinister. Somber and dirty, it retains the form  
215 and smell of the dead, and of the terrible living thing that I  
am. No movement of repulsion, no sign of worry; Amica, un-  
moved, appears in my abode, penetrates the drama of my existence.

Amica is the Devil. I invite the Devil into my home.

Laughing heartily, she puts her arms around my neck.

220 Her beautiful firm arms seem dangerous to me, destined to some  
unknown role in my destruction. I resist their enchantment.  
(What cold reptiles have encircled me?) I rudely pull her  
stubborn arms off my neck. Their resistance pleases me. I

J'observe, j'épie sa physionomie. Pour la deuxième  
fois, j'ai rabattu son capulet sans qu'elle proteste ni ne  
sorte de son apparente apathie. Nous entrons dans la maison.  
J'ai refermé la porte sur nous. Pas un muscle de son visage  
ne bouge. La maison est sinistre, pourtant. Sale, sombre,  
elle garde la forme et l'odeur de la morte et du terrible  
vivant que je suis. Aucun recul, aucune inquiétude; Amica,  
impassible, apparaît en ma demeure, pénètre en mon drame.

Amica est le diable. Je convie le diable chez moi.

En riant beaucoup, elle met ses bras autour de mon  
cou. Ses beaux bras fermes me semblent malsains, destinés à  
je ne sais quel rôle précis dans ma perte. Je résiste à leur  
enchantement. (Quels reptiles frais m'ont enlacé?) J'arrache  
brusquement de ma nuque les bras qui s'obstinent. Leur résis-





twist them. That makes me feel good, but does not reassure  
 225 me. The use of my physical strength indicates only too well  
 the defection of my spiritual strength. Brutality is the  
 recourse of those who no longer have any inner strength.

I go outside. A gust of humid air on my forehead.  
 Already, I have only one desire. To go back in, to find again  
 230 Amica's enchaining arms. The evening air is nothing. I now  
 know another freshness, another confusion.

I open the door, I find her standing at the end of  
 the room, cutting bread. I let my armful of wood drop to the  
 floor; not moving, still on the threshold of the door, I cry  
 235 out to her:

--"Good day, my woman!"

The meal, sitting facing each other. The lamp flame  
 is brighter, because she has washed the glass globe. Her shawl

tance me plaît. Je les tords. Cela me fait du bien, mais ne  
 me rassure pas. L'emploi de ma force physique indique trop  
 bien la défection de ma puissance spirituelle. La brutalité  
 est le recours de ceux qui n'ont plus de pouvoir intérieur.

Je sors. Une bouffée d'air humide sur mon front.  
 Déjà, je n'ai plus qu'un désir. Rentrer, retrouver l'en-  
 chaînement des bras d'Amica. L'air du soir n'est rien. Je  
 connais, maintenant, une autre fraîcheur, un autre trouble.

Quand j'ouvre la porte, je la trouve debout, au fond  
 de la pièce, en train de couper du pain. Je jette ma brassée  
 de bois à terre; et, immobile, sans quitter le seuil, je lui  
 crie:

--"Bonjour, ma femme!"

Le repas, l'un en face de l'autre. La flamme de la  
 lampe plus claire, puisqu'elle a lavé le globe. Son châle sur



on a chair; her mantle hanging from a nail. What is this  
 240 peaceful household that I notice around me? For nothing seems  
 to penetrate me any more. I see a stranger eating in front  
 of an unknown woman. They are both as secretive as the other.  
 No, I have not lived in this place nor inside this man.

Behold, I welcome the woman to my bed, and the man  
 245 who accompanies her.

How long is it since I took my mother's huge bed?  
 I do not yet have the strength to occupy her room; but one  
 evening, I carried her bed to my room in the attic, replacing  
 the straw pallet of my childhood. Was I afraid to see the  
 250 horror of my nights become insipid? I play with an open wound.  
 I have it. I am it, and it is me. And then, what good is it  
 to hold forth on the reason for my moves and impulses. I am  
 not free.

une chaise, sa mante pendue à un clou. Quel est ce ménage pai-  
 sible que j'aperçois à côté de moi? Car en moi rien ne paraît  
 plus pénétrer. Je vois un inconnu qui mange en face d'une  
 femme inconnue. Ils sont aussi secrets l'un que l'autre. Non,  
 je n'ai pas habité ce lieu, ni cet homme.

Voici que j'accueille en mon lit la femme et l'homme  
 qui l'accompagne.

Depuis combien de temps ai-je repris le grand lit de  
 ma mère? Je n'ai pas encore eu la force d'occuper toute sa  
 chambre; mais, un soir, j'ai monté le lit dans mon grenier,  
 en remplacement de ma pailleasse d'enfant. Craignais-je de  
 voir s'affadir l'horreur de mes nuits? Je joue avec une plaie.  
 Je l'entretiens. Je suis elle, et elle est moi. Et puis, à  
 quoi bon disserter sur la raison de mes gestes et impulsions.  
 Je ne suis pas libre.



I introduce Amica to the vertigo of my nights. Ah!

255 you do not know, long blue mane of hair, phosphorescent eyes;  
 nor do you, arms of cool flesh, what this bed that receives  
 you and your deaf companion, really is. What old sleeplessness  
 lurks about it, offering innumerable fevers and terrors! And  
 sleep is hardly any better. It is only a descent into the

260 deepest pit of the subconscious, where I can neither move nor  
 help myself for my actions; such a weak descent that, I can do  
 the same while awake.

I observe the alien couple during its wedding night.

I am the wedding guest. Amica displays a freedom and skill

265 with her caresses that plunge me into a dreamy wonder. She  
 sleeps. The familiar demons appear around the black sculpture  
 of the bed. Ah! I shall no longer be tormented alone. No.

J'introduis Amica dans le vertige de mes nuits. Ah!  
 vous ne savez pas, longue chevelure bleue, ni vous, prunelles  
 phosphorescentes, ni vous, chair des bras frais, quel est ce  
 lit qui vous reçoit, vous et votre sourd compagnon! Quelles  
 vieilles insomnies veillent alentour, offrant les fièvres et  
 les terreurs innombrables! Et le sommeil ne vaut guère mieux.  
 Il n'est que descente au gouffre le plus creux de la subcon-  
 science, là où je ne puis ni jouer, ni me défendre, si faible-  
 ment que je puisse le faire éveillé.

J'observe le couple étranger en sa nuit de noces.  
 Je suis l'invité des noces. Amica montre une aisance, une  
 habileté dans les caresses qui me plongent dans un étonnement  
 rêveur. Elle dort. Les démons familiers appareillent dans  
 les noires sculptures du lit. Ah! je ne serai plus seul tour-  
 menté! Non, ils épargnent son sommeil calme. Ils se déploient





They spare her calm sleep. They deploy themselves around her at a distance. She forms an island of calm on my accursed bed.

270           The morning appears. I feel the faraway murmur of the Torrent, awake, inside of me. Am I dreaming? Why these small shoes at the foot of the bed? And on the chair, those flimsy clothes? Ah! what is this head asleep on my chest?

I take it in my hands like a ball. It kisses me.

275   It bores me. It embarrasses me. What am I to do with it? Throw it away? I feel an extreme dryness. Not desire, nor voluptuousness. Dryness. Dryness for everything. Thus, an arbitrary will has forever broken any mainspring of emotion and pleasure within me. Ah! Mother, I cannot even begin to  
280   guess the span of your destructiveness inside me.

I get up. I lean out the window, wanting to escape the vision of the extraordinary nuptials celebrated in my home.

de loin autour d'elle. Elle forme une île calme sur ma couche maudite.

Le matin point. Je sens le murmure lointain du torrent, en marche, en moi. Est-ce que je rêve! Pourquoi ces petits souliers au pied du lit? Sur la chaise, ces étoffes légères? Ah! que fait cette tête endormie sur ma poitrine?

Je la prends dans mes mains, telle une boule. Elle m'embarrasse. Elle m'ennuie. Elle me gêne. Qu'est-ce que je vais en faire? La jeter? J'éprouve une telle sécheresse. Ni désir, ni volupté. Sécheresse. Sécheresse de tout. Ainsi depuis toujours une volonté arbitraire a saccagé tout principe d'émotion et de jouissance en moi. Ah! ma mère, je ne pouvais deviner toute l'ampleur de votre destruction en moi!

Je me lève. Je me penche à la fenêtre, voulant échapper à la vision des noces étrangères célébrées chez moi. J'agis



I act discreetly, as if not wanting to let the sleeping couple notice my frustrated presence in their wedding chamber.

285           The days have passed. A routine has established  
itself. Amica busies herself with the meals and the housekeep-  
ing. And I, with the stable. It is not yet time for the gar-  
den and fields. I do not want to leave her alone in the house,  
not for an instant. I follow her always. My nerves are frayed.  
290 I cannot answer for anything.

Why did I not take her back after the first night?  
She was already a burden on me. If I did not, it is for fear  
of the highway, of the wandering peddler who could be there  
with others to gape at me and to ask questions, perhaps even  
300 intending to come here. This thought is unbearable to me.  
Nevertheless, I believed myself to be secure in my retreat.  
The bridges to the outside, to the inhabited universe, were

par discrétion, comme si je ne voulais pas laisser le couple  
endormi s'apercevoir de ma présence frustrée dans la chambre  
nuptiale.

Les jours ont passé. Une continuité s'est établie.  
Amica s'occupe des repas et du ménage. Moi, de l'étable. Ce  
n'est pas encore l'époque des champs et du jardin. Je ne veux  
pas la laisser seule, un instant, dans la maison. Je la suis  
sans cesse. J'ai les nerfs à bout. Je ne réponds de rien.

Pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas reconduite après la première  
nuit? Elle m'était déjà à charge. Si je ne l'ai pas fait,  
c'est par peur de la grand'route, du marchand ambulant qui  
pourrait être là et avoir amassé des badauds pour me voir, me  
questionner, peut-être dans l'intention de venir jusqu'ici?  
Cette pensée m'est insupportable. Je croyais, pourtant, être  
à l'abri en ma retraite. Les ponts se trouvaient coupés d'avec



cut. And I cut them, also, out from under Amica's feet. She wanted to become a witness to my life. She will not leave it so easily. A witness! A word that wounds me, obsesses me! It is enough to make me afraid; as if I were seeing a large mirror whose images could not be effaced, one that retained my gestures and looks. My witness cannot go back into the world, not at any price.

At night sometimes, when I awaken I see her sitting at the end of the bed, combing her mane. I am always surprised by the extreme attention of those eyes staring at me. She observes me, tense, ready to flee at the least alarm. To be truthful, I feel her stare even when my eyes are closed. It weighs over my sleep, with all its strange weight. It is she who wakes me by pure force of concentration. It is like

l'univers habité. Et je les ai aussi coupés sous les pas d'Amica. Elle a voulu devenir témoin de ma vie. Elle ne la quittera pas si facilement. Témoin, quel mot qui me blesse, m'obsède! Amica est un témoin... Témoin de quoi? Témoin de moi, de ma présence, de ma maison. Cela suffit pour me donner la frousse, comme si je voyais un grand miroir aux images ineffaçables retenir mes gestes et mes regards. A aucun prix, il ne faut relâcher mon témoin dans le monde.

La nuit, parfois, lorsque je m'éveille, je la vois assise sur le pied du lit, peignant sa chevelure. Je suis invariablement surpris de l'extrême attention de ses yeux qui me dévisagent. Elle m'observe, tendue, prête à fuir à la moindre alerte. A la vérité, je sens son regard, même sous ma paupière fermée. Il pèse sur mon sommeil, de tout son poids étrange.





hypnosis. What is she trying to do? Does she hope to possess me entirely? I would kill her before that.

Once, no longer able to stand the exasperating insis-  
 320 tence of her eyes, I tried to hit Amica. In a bound, she jump-  
 ed from the bed to the floor. This springy leap was such a  
 revelation to me that I forgot about running after her. The  
 sharp uneasiness caused by those very wide staring eyes fast-  
 ened on me, is completed by the impression of that supple leap.  
 325 It makes me remember a certain cat.

My mother wanted no cat around the house. Probably  
 because she knew neither she nor it would ever bow to servitude.  
 She would have only those animals that could be kept in hand  
 and be made to grovel and tremble at her feet. (Ah! Perceval,  
 330 then who were you?) I have never seen a cat hereabouts, ex-  
 cept during the last days of my mother's life. A cat prowled

C'est lui qui me réveille, à force de concentration. Cela res-  
 semble presque à de l'hypnotisme. A quoi veut-elle en venir?  
 Espère-t-elle me posséder en mon intégrité? Je la tuerais, avant.

Une fois, ne pouvant plus soutenir cette exaspérante  
 insistance, j'ai voulu frapper Amica. D'un bond, elle a sauté  
 à terre. Ce bond élastique a été pour moi une telle révélation  
 que je n'ai plus pensé à courir après Amica. Le malaise poignant  
 que me donnaient les yeux trop grands ouverts attachés sur moi  
 est complété par l'impression de la chute souple. Cela me rap-  
 pelle un certain chat.

Ma mère ne voulait pas garder de chat. Probablement  
 parce qu'elle savait qu'aucun d'eux ne se plierait jamais à la  
 servitude. Elle n'acceptait que des bêtes qu'on peut tenir en  
 main et faire ramper, tremblantes, à ses pieds. (Ah! Perceval,  
 qui étiez-vous donc?) Je n'ai pas vu de chat ici, si ce n'est  
 les derniers jours de la vie de ma mère. Un chat rôda alors



in the vicinity. It only showed itself, for some strange reason, when I was alone. I remember having been upset and irritated by the sensation that the animal was spying on me, with its dilated pupils. It seemed to follow within me a hidden formation of some purpose that escaped me, but whose inevitable end it alone could foretell.

The last time I noticed the cat was when I stood calculating the immense size of my fallen mother. That animal, aware and out of reach, continued to keep its fixed and eternal stare on me. Did someone or something catch me unawares, then? Did it gaze at me without interruption, in full day? Did someone come to know me at the moment when I no longer possessed any awareness of myself?

Amica has the same eyes as that cat. Two large discs that appear motionless, but that flicker like a flame. She

aux environs. Il ne se montrait, chose extraordinaire, que lorsque j'étais seul. Je me souviens d'avoir été troublé, irrité, par la sensation que l'animal me guettait de ses pupilles dilatées. Il semblait suivre en moi la formation latente d'un dessein qui m'échappait, et dont lui seul pénétrait le dénouement inévitable.

La dernière fois que j'aperçus le chat, c'était quand je mesurais ma mère ravagée. La bête consciente et hors d'atteinte, continuait sur moi son fixe regard d'éternité. Quelqu'un m'a donc surpris? Quelqu'un m'a donc contemplé, sans interruption ni nuit? Quelqu'un m'a donc connu, au moment même où moi je ne possédais plus de regard sur moi?

Amica a les mêmes yeux que ce chat. Deux grands disques en apparence immobiles, mais qui palpitent comme la flamme.



examines me as I sleep. She examines me when I no longer see.  
 She can discover in my dreams, the gestures of my alienation,  
 those gestures buried in the most obscure regions of my being  
 350 satiated with sleep, in order to leave this bitter taste of  
 morning, just enough to feed the day's torment.

Following that, I did not see the cat again. I often  
 had a singular impression about it. It seemed that the malefi-  
 cent creature disappeared into me. It knew everything and it  
 355 lived inside of me, heavy with the full weight of its certainty.

And today, to find the same way this woman with eyes  
 so surprisingly similar, I am convinced I behold my witness,  
 reappearing suddenly in life. My hidden witness emerges in my  
 consciousness, facing me, clearly visible. This witness tor-  
 360 tures me! It wants me to confess! What is this sorceress do-  
 ing here? I do not want her to look at me! I do not want her

Elle m'examine quand je dors. Elle me regarde quand je ne me  
 vois plus. Elle peut découvrir dans mes songes les gestes de  
 mon absence, ces gestes enfouis dans les régions les plus ob-  
 scures de mon être et que le sommeil ressasse à loisir, afin  
 de laisser au matin ce relent amer, juste de quoi nourrir le  
 tourment du jour.

Dans la suite, je n'ai pas revu le chat. J'avais sou-  
 vent une singulière impression à son sujet. Il me semblait  
 que la bête maléfique était disparue en moi. Elle savait tout  
 et elle existait en moi, pesant du poids entier de sa certitude.

Et, aujourd'hui, de trouver ainsi cette femme aux  
 yeux si étonnamment semblables, rivés sur moi, je crois voir  
 mon témoin surgir au jour. Mon témoin occulte émerger dans ma  
 conscience, en face de moi, bien au clair. Il me torture! Il  
 veut que j'avoue! Qu'est venue faire ici cette sorcière? Je  
 ne veux pas qu'elle me regarde! Je ne veux pas qu'elle me





to question me! I know very well that I will never rid myself  
 of her. A creature found me out at the moment of Perceval's  
 escape. Now outside of me, separate from me and without com-  
 365 plicity, this witness interrogates me directly, like a judge.  
 She pursues me into my most secret refuge, where the witness  
 herself first resided. The witness penetrates deeper than my  
 own conscience. I know nothing! nothing! If the cat knows,  
 it has learned nothing from me. No! No! Do not smile, Amica.  
 370 It is not from me. I myself know nothing.

Her skirts and shawls cover her and seem to be held  
 together by the moving clasp of her hands, opening and closing  
 according to the will of her lively or listless bearing. A  
 network of folds sliding from her hands soon becomes a series  
 375 of pleated waves. A play of folds and fingers. A noose of  
 folds at the chest held by a single hand. The glisten of silk

questionne! Je sais bien que je ne pourrai jamais m'en débar-  
 rasser. Une créature m'a connu à l'instant de la fuite de Per-  
 ceval. Ce témoin maintenant m'interroge, directement, du dehors  
 de moi, séparé de moi, sans connivence, comme un juge. Il me  
 poursuit dans mon refuge le plus secret, là où fut sa propre  
 demeure. Il viole plus profondément que ma conscience. Je ne  
 sais rien! Je ne sais rien! Si ce chat sait, lui, il n'est  
 pas de moi. Non! Non! Ne souris pas, Amica. Il n'est pas  
 de moi. Moi, je ne sais rien.

Ses jupes et châles la drapent et ne semblent retenus  
 que par les agrafes mouvantes de ses mains, plus ou moins ser-  
 rées, selon les caprices de sa démarche vive ou nonchalante.  
 Un réseau de plis glissant de ses mains et renaissant plus loin  
 en ondes pressées. Jeux des plis et des mains. Noeud de plis  
 sur la poitrine en une seule main. Scintillement de soie trop



stretched too tightly across the shoulders. The equilibrium broken, it reappears elsewhere on the torso. Silk slips, a shoulder is bare, arms are unveiled. Fingers so brown against  
 380 the red skirt. The skirt is quickly lifted in fistfuls to climb the stairs. The ankles are trim, the legs perfect. A knee emerges. Everything has disappeared. The skirt sweeps along the floor, the hands are free, the bosom disappears.

This morning, Amica had layed out the few forks,  
 385 spoons and knives that I own. She seemed to be reflecting while looking at them. When she caught sight of me, she spoke to me with liveliness, showing me with many gestures the poor place-settings. I did not at all understand what she wanted to say. Then, for the first time, she scribbled me a message  
 390 on a piece of paper: "Are they silver?"

I could not help but burst out laughing, and I quickly wrote on the paper: "Certainly not, you stupid woman!"

tendue sur les épaules. Equilibre rompu, recréé ailleurs. Glissement de soie, épaule nue, dévoilement des bras. Doigts si bruns sur la jupe rouge. La jupe est relevée à poignées, prestement, pour monter l'escalier. Les chevilles sont fines, les jambes parfaites. Un genou saillit. Tout est disparu. La jupe balaie le plancher, les mains sont libres et le corsage ne tient plus.

Ce matin, Amica avait aligné sur la table les quelques cuillers, fourchettes et couteaux que je possède. Elle paraissait réfléchir en les contemplant. Quand elle m'a aperçu, elle m'a parlé avec animation en me désignant avec force gestes les pauvres couverts. Je ne comprenais absolument rien à ce qu'elle pouvait vouloir dire. Alors, pour la première fois, elle m'a griffonné quelque chose sur un bout de papier: "C'est en argent?"

Je n'ai pu m'empêcher d'éclater de rire, et j'ai écrit à la suite sur le papier: "Mais non, grosse dinde!"



Amica bit her lips, vexed and furious.

395 It is curious, nevertheless. Why did she want so much to know if my cutlery was silver?

Amica has an odd way of doing housework. She can polish, or to be more exact, pry about the same chests and nooks for hours; whereas there are some tasks she does not undertake at all. For example, minding the stove, scouring  
400 the pots and pans. I watch her and I think she is looking for something. What is she doing here? What if there had been no coincidence in our meeting? On the contrary, what if she was waiting for me purposely in order to come and find out about the dead woman and the living man in this place? Why then,  
405 did I go to meet this woman? I see no way of getting rid of her at present. If I were to pit her capacity for suffering against mine? What then? No, it is necessary that I watch

Amica s'est mordu les lèvres, l'air dépitée et furieuse.

C'est singulier, tout de même. Pourquoi voulait-elle tant savoir si mes couverts sont d'argent?

Amica a une drôle de façon de faire le ménage. Elle peut frotter, fureter plutôt, pendant des heures dans la même armoire, le même coin, tandis qu'il y a certaines besognes qu'elle n'entreprend jamais. Par exemple, miner le poêle, récurer les casseroles. Je la surveille et je crois qu'elle cherche quelque chose. Qu'est-elle venue faire ici? S'il n'y avait aucun hasard dans notre rencontre? Si, au contraire, elle m'attendait exprès pour venir enquêter sur la morte et le vivant d'ici? Pourquoi suis-je donc allé au-devant de cette femme? Je ne vois aucune issue pour m'en défaire, à présent. Si je mesurais sa capacité de souffrir avec la mienne? Non, il





her carefully. I am so afraid she will go away with my secret while I sleep. I must not sleep any more. Keep awake. Keep  
 410 guard over myself. That is what is unrelenting in the long run. The only thing I do is watch over myself, live within myself. The only voices I hear are inner ones. No mouth speaks them, no intermediary gives them meanings. They reach me, sharp as arrows. I am plunged to the centre of my being, unremittingly.  
 415 After a childhood tortured by the strict prohibition of any intimate and profound knowledge of existence, I am suddenly faced with the inner abyss of the self. I am swallowed up there. While alive, I taste the last judgement: that real confrontation with oneself. It is too much for human strength.  
 420 I am on fire. Oh! I am not always clear-headed. My feverish head deforms the voices. But it is enough for me to know that they speak and that they accuse me. I accuse myself. At times,

faut que je la ménage. J'ai trop peur qu'elle s'en aille avec mon secret, pendant que je dors. Il faudrait ne plus dormir. Veiller. Veiller sur soi. C'est cela qui est implacable, à la longue. Je ne fais que veiller sur moi, que vivre en moi. Les seules voix qui me parviennent sont intérieures. Aucune bouche ne les traduit, aucun intermédiaire n'y met des formes. Elles m'atteignent, aiguës comme des flèches. Je suis plongé au centre de moi-même, sans rémission. Après une enfance supplicié par la stricte défense de la connaissance intime, profonde, tout d'un coup, j'ai été en face du gouffre intérieur de l'homme. Je m'y suis abîmé. De mon vivant, je goûte au jugement dernier: cette confrontation réelle avec soi. C'est trop pour les forces humaines. Je brûle. Oh! je ne suis pas toujours lucide. Ma tête malade déforme les voix. Mais il me suffit de savoir qu'elles parlent et qu'elles m'accusent. Je m'accuse moi-même. Parfois, il me vient une pensée qui pourrait



a thought comes to me, one that could be relief, grace, if I could believe in relief and if grace were not refused me.

425 Every man carries within him a secret crime, oozing forth, that he expiates.

When I was small, I would fall asleep, dazed by work and fear. And sometimes I happened to feel for an instant, a presence that was a kind of consolation, rising above all that  
430 I suffered. I dared not abandon myself to this sweet comfort my mother called the temptation of indolence. I would steel myself, at the same time conscious of perhaps killing an angel by my rejection. To rationalize, I told myself that it could only be a bad angel, for the good are God's policemen and punish  
435 children who are too soft.

The experience of God had been forbidden me, and yet they wanted to make a priest out of me! Very early I was led away from any possible goodness from God.

Être un allégement, une grâce, si je pouvais croire à l'apaisement et si la grâce ne m'était pas refusée. Tout homme porte en soi un crime inconnu qui suinte et qu'il expie.

Quand j'étais petit, je m'endormais, abruti de travail et de crainte. Il m'arrivait alors, parfois, de sentir, un instant, une présence qui était une espèce de consolation, supérieure à tout ce que j'ai souffert. Je n'osais m'abandonner à cette douceur, appelée tentation de mollesse par ma mère. Je me raidissais, conscient de tuer peut-être un ange en me récusant. Pour me raisonner, je me disais que ce ne pouvait être qu'un mauvais ange, car les bons font la police de Dieu et punissent les petits enfants trop tendres.

L'expérience de Dieu m'était défendue, et l'on voulait faire un prêtre de moi! Très tôt, je fus détourné de la saveur possible de Dieu.



If grace exists, I have lost it. I have thrust it  
 440 off. Or perhaps it is more profound than that: someone before  
 me and whose extension I am, refused grace on my behalf. O!  
 Mother, how I hate you! And I have not yet fully explored the  
 extent of your devastation in me. A sentence haunts my nights:  
 "You are my son, your life will continue my life." I am bound  
 445 to a damned soul. I have participated in her damnation, as  
 she has in mine... No! No, I am not responsible for anything!  
 I am not free! Let me repeat, I am not free! I have never been  
 free! Ah! who beats me so ruthlessly? The Torrent bursts in my  
 head! And I am not alone! This girl that I took from the high-  
 450 way is in front of me, observes me and spies on me. She must not  
 see me this way. I am drawn to the falls. It is necessary that  
 I look at the reflection of my inner self. I lean over the boil-  
 ing whirlpool. I am leaning out over myself.

Si la grâce existe, je l'ai perdue. Je l'ai repoussée.  
 Ou plutôt, c'est plus profond que cela: quelqu'un d'avant moi  
 et dont je suis le prolongement a refusé la grâce pour moi. O  
 ma mère, que je vous hais! et je n'ai pas encore tout exploré  
 le champ de votre dévastation en moi. Une phrase hante mes  
 nuits: "Tu es mon fils, tu me continues." Je suis lié à une  
 damnée. J'ai participé à sa damnation, comme elle, à la mienne...  
 Non! Non, je ne suis responsable de rien! Je ne suis pas  
 libre. Puisque je vous répète que je ne suis pas libre! Que  
 je n'ai jamais été libre! Ah! qui me frappe avec cet acharne-  
 ment? Le torrent bondit dans ma tête! Et je ne suis pas seul!  
 Cette fille que j'ai cueillie sur la route est devant moi;  
 m'observe et m'épie. Il ne faut pas qu'elle me voie en cet état.  
 Je suis tiré près des chutes. Il est nécessaire que je regarde  
 mon image intérieure. Je me penche sur le gouffre bouillonnant.  
 Je suis penché sur moi.





How many hours have gone by? What instinct makes  
 455 me climb back up the steep bank? The instinct of the terrier  
 who retrieves the wounded quarry? If I return, it is because  
 the Torrent is not yet my absolute abode. The house of my  
 childhood is still working on me, and also perhaps Amica...

I am not completely prepared for my definitive inte-  
 460 gration with the fury of the falls, nor for the deepest abyss  
 within myself. I escape once more. The final unravelling,  
 the farthest flight into the self, into my despair, remains  
 in suspense. For how many hours? Days? Acceptance of my des-  
 tiny does not depend on my will. The next crisis will get the  
 465 best of it.

The springs, strengthened by the recent rainfall,  
 flow through the rocks. I walk in the water. I am so weak I  
 must stop after each step.

Combien d'heures ont passé? Quel instinct me fait  
 remonter la rive escarpée? Instinct du terrier qui ramène les  
 bêtes blessées? Si je reviens, c'est que le torrent n'est pas  
 encore ma demeure absolue. La maison de mon enfance agit en-  
 core sur moi, et peut-être aussi Amica...

Je ne suis pas complètement préparé pour l'intégra-  
 tion définitive à la furie des chutes, ni pour le plus profond  
 abîme en moi-même. Je m'échappe encore. Le dénouement, la  
 fuite extrême en soi, en mon désespoir, reste en suspens. Pour  
 combien d'heures? De jours? Le consentement à mon destin ne  
 dépend pas de ma volonté. La prochaine crise l'emportera.

Les sources du rocher coulent renforcées par les  
 pluies récentes. Je marche dans l'eau. Je suis si faible que  
 je me trouve obligé de m'arrêter à chaque pas.



I take a drink from the pump. I sprinkle my head  
 470 with water. Amica is not there. I get into bed with my clothes  
 on, my head splitting. It does not worry me yet (I think so  
 slowly) not to have seen her come home. Usually, I do not let  
 her out of my sight. Besides, she never goes far. What is  
 she doing then? Moreover, it is night. I have already told  
 475 her about the wolves in the mountains.

Amica is back. I am too weary to question her. She  
 is more clinging and caressing than usual. She seems rich with  
 undiscovered caresses. Her fullness has come to its fruition.  
 I would like to push this sated female away. What is wrong  
 480 with me? What mate does my humiliation need?

She places her hands on my forehead. I cannot help  
 enjoying the softness of her hands against my burning. Sudden-  
 ly, because of a certain revelation, panic grips me. I did not

Je bois à la pompe. Je m'asperge la tête d'eau.  
 Amica n'est pas là. Je me couche tout habillé, la tête bri-  
 sée. Cela ne m'inquiète pas encore (je pense si lentement) de  
 ne pas la voir rentrée. D'habitude, je ne la perds pas de vue.  
 D'ailleurs, elle ne s'éloigne jamais. Que fait-elle donc?  
 Pourtant, c'est le soir. Je lui ai déjà parlé des loups dans  
 la montagne.

Amica est de retour. Je suis trop las pour l'inter-  
 roger. Elle est plus lourde et caressante que d'ordinaire.  
 Elle paraît riche de caresses inconnues. Elle atteint la  
 forme de sa plénitude. Je voudrais éloigner cette fille repue.  
 Qu'ai-je à être si difficile? Quelle compagne faut-il donc  
 à mon humiliation?

Elle pose ses mains sur mon front. Je ne puis m'em-  
 pêcher de jouir de ses mains douces contre ma brûlure. Tout  
 à coup la panique s'empare de moi, à une certaine révélation



think that I had opened my mouth to ask for water, but had  
485 only mentally desired it. Amica makes a sign saying yes, and  
helps me drink, holding up my head like a child. I must be  
rolling my stupefied eyes at her. She laughs.

I am certain now that I no longer have any power over  
my voice. I do not know if I am speaking out loud or if I am  
490 continuing an inner monologue. Amica can read my thoughts. My  
brain is open, exposed in front of her. I had not imagined this  
keystone to my horror. I am delivered into the hands of this  
worthless woman. I bite my lips, I bite back the words in my  
mouth. She laughs.

495 I do not have enough strength to get up. I wear my-  
self out trying to do so. My head is splitting. I would like  
to chase Amica away. From the time of her coming, she must  
have surprised me in this state many times. What does she

que j'ai. Je ne croyais pas avoir ouvert la bouche, mais seule-  
ment désiré mentalement avoir de l'eau. Amica fait signe que  
oui et m'aide à boire comme un enfant, en soulevant ma tête.  
Je dois rouler des yeux stupéfiés sur elle. Elle rit.

Je possède donc la certitude que je ne conserve au-  
cune maîtrise sur ma voix. Je ne sais si je parle haut ou si  
je continue mon monologue intérieur. Amica peut lire mes  
pensées. Mon cerveau est à découvert devant elle. Je n'avais  
pas imaginé ce comble à mon horreur! Je suis livré à cette  
vaurienne! Je me mords les lèvres, afin de ne plus laisser  
échapper aucune parole. Elle rit.

Je n'ai pas la force de me lever. Je m'épuise en  
vains efforts. La tête m'éclate. Je voudrais chasser Amica.  
Depuis son arrivée, elle a dû me surprendre ainsi bien des fois.





really know? She gives me something to drink. I inhale the  
 500 unusual odour of her skin. A strange odour that infuriates  
 me. Then, I think I recognize a particular aroma, smelled  
 once before, of human skin not so young, of tobacco and offi-  
 cial papers and ink... This makes me think of the police  
 chief who questioned me after my mother's death!... I let  
 505 out a cry, the force of which I feel only as a contraction in  
 my chest and by Amica's jumping to her feet. She is pale.  
 Her shawl has fallen in folds to the floor, baring her shoul-  
 ders and arms. I would like to tear apart the flesh she  
 offers with my teeth and nails.

510 I no longer have a shelter within me. The sacrilege  
 has been committed. My most secret self is plundered. I am  
 naked, exposed in front of this girl who pillages for the po-  
 lice. She will know even more, so much that it is not necessary

Que sait-elle au juste? Elle me donne à boire. Je respire  
 une odeur insolite sur sa peau. Une odeur étrangère qui m'out-  
 rage. Puis, je crois reconnaître un arôme particulier, déjà  
 senti, composé de cuir humain pas très jeune, de tabac, de  
 paperasses et d'encre... Cela me fait penser au chef de po-  
 lice, à l'interrogatoire qu'il me fit subir après la mort de  
 ma mère!... Je pousse un cri dont je ne me rends compte qu'à  
 une contraction de ma poitrine et surtout au saut que fait  
 Amica qui s'est levée toute droite. Elle est pâle. Son châle  
 a roulé à terre, découvrant ses épaules et ses bras. Je vou-  
 drai déchirer de mes dents, de mes ongles, sa chair offerte.

Je n'ai plus d'abri intérieur. Le sacrilège est com-  
 mis. Le saccage de mon être le plus secret est accompli. Je  
 suis nu, dehors, devant cette fille en pillage pour le compte  
 de la police. Elle en saura même plus long qu'il n'est néces-



for any judicial report. She will penetrate to the meaning  
 515 of my torment.

The fever is on me. If I talk during my delirium,  
 I do not hear myself. And she, she replaces my lost hearing.  
 She usurps my role of primary listener. I communicate with  
 her instead of with myself. My soul has been raped. I was  
 520 told only God had the power and the right to do so. My su-  
 preme judgement will be given by a shameless woman. At this  
 moment, I would like to believe in God, in his terrible  
 righteousness and in his perfect majesty. Would that He could  
 hear my confession, and that He would consume me in my truth,  
 525 and not this girl! Not this miserable nothing! The Devil is  
 truly very powerful! And I am his accomplice.

I feel the humid springtime, it comes through the  
 window. The smell of the falls is in the springtime air. I

saire à un rapport judiciaire. Elle pénétrera mon tourment.

La fièvre est sur moi. Si je parle en mon délire,  
 je ne m'entends pas. Et, elle, elle remplace mon ouïe per-  
 due. Elle usurpe mon rôle d'auditeur premier. Je communique  
 avec elle au lieu d'avec moi. Mon âme est violée. On m'avait  
 dit que Dieu seul avait ce pouvoir et ce droit. L'arrêt su-  
 prême sera prononcé par une drôlesse. En ce moment, je vou-  
 drai croire en Dieu, en sa droiture terrible et sa parfaite  
 grandeur. Que lui me confesse et m'absorbe en ma vérité. Pas  
 cette fille! Pas cette misérable nullité! Le diable est  
 donc bien puissant! Et je suis son complice.

Je sens le printemps humide qui monte par la fenêtre.  
 L'odeur des chutes est dans le printemps. J'ai l'odorat d'un



have a dog's keen sense of smell. From the time I was struck  
 530 deaf, this sense has developed and increased in a singular  
 fashion. My sense of smell, like that of a hunted animal,  
 makes me fear the hand of the police over Amica. But, what  
 if I were wrong?... There is no smell of ink and paper... Ah!  
 I believe it to be the rancid aftersmell of the peddler!...

535 Amica tucks me in like a child in a cradle. I struggle.  
 She laughs. What would I not give to hear the sound of  
 her laughter! I only know its ever wilder grimace.

Amica leaves me. She is downstairs. She must be  
 searching everything. The way is clear. It is fair play. She  
 540 wants the material proof of the crime. For the twenty years or  
 so that I have searched, will she do any better? There are  
 certainly some corners of the house to which I have forbidden  
 access. In the stable, in a certain stall, a certain spot in

chien. Depuis ma surdité, ce sens s'est développé, accru d'une  
 singulière façon. Mon flair d'animal traqué m'a fait craindre  
 la touche de la police sur Amica. Mais, si je m'étais trom-  
 pé?... Il n'y a pas de senteur d'encre et de papier... Ah!  
 je crois que c'est plutôt le goût rance du colporteur!...

Amica me borde comme un enfant au berceau. Je me  
 débats. Elle rit. Qu'est-ce que je donnerais pour entendre  
 le son de son rire! Je n'en connais que cette grimace de plus  
 en plus sauvage.

Amica me quitte. Elle est en bas. Elle doit fouil-  
 ler partout. Le champ est libre. Elle a beau jeu. Elle veut  
 les preuves matérielles du crime. Depuis peut-être vingt ans  
 que je cherche, moi, sera-t-elle mieux servie? Il y a bien  
 certains recoins prohibés par moi dans la maison. Dans l'étable,  
 une certaine stalle, un certain endroit dans le foin poussiéreux,





in the dusty twenty year-old hay. An unquestionable heaviness  
 545 comes down on my memory and seals it... To Amica nothing is  
 forbidden; she will go everywhere, to the densest part of a  
 terror poorly held together.

I have the coroner's verdict before my eyes: "Acciden-  
 tal death." What is this tramp doing then, snooping around here?  
 550 There is nothing to find out. The peddler can know nothing. He  
 can repeat nothing whatsoever to the police. Nor can Amica.

The fever freezes, then burns me up. What is Amica  
 doing? I do not have the physical strength to get up. When  
 she comes back up, I will strangle her. Or better, I will await  
 555 the full return of my strength, and I will throw this spy into  
 the water. For an instant, my arms will balance her high over  
 the precipice. She will struggle. I will not relish the sound

vieux de vingt ans. Une certaine lourdeur à ma mémoire morte  
 où sont apposés les scellés... Pour Amica, rien d'interdit;  
 elle ira partout, au plus épais d'une épouvante mal jointe...

J'ai devant les yeux le verdict du coroner: "Mort  
 accidentelle." Qu'a donc cette fille à perquisitionner ici?  
 Il n'y a rien à apprendre. Le marchand ambulant ne saura rien.  
 Il ne pourra répéter quoi que ce soit à la police. Ni Amica  
 non plus.

La fièvre me glace et me consume. Que fait Amica?  
 Que découvrira-t-elle? Se peut-il qu'elle trouve quelque  
 chose? Je n'ai pas le pouvoir physique de me lever. Quand  
 elle remontera, je l'étranglerai. Ou plutôt, j'attendrai le  
 retour complet de ma vigueur et je jetterai l'espionne dans  
 l'eau. Un instant, mes bras la balanceront au-dessus du pré-  
 cipice. Elle se débattrra. Je ne goûterai pas à ses cris,



of her cries, but only her convulsions of terror. Then, Amica will be decapitated and dismembered as she falls. Parts of her  
 560 body will bounce over the rocks. No! No! I do not want her severed head on my chest! Nothing! None of her! Her long blue hair around my neck. It smothers me.

I must have slept. It is morning. Amica has not come back. She has fled. I am sure she has fled. Is this a  
 565 sign then, that she has found what she was looking for? What was it? In what drawer? In what chest? Oh! the roughness of the stable floor that drinks up the dark blood!

The mountains must be surrounded. The police and their savage dogs are waiting for me. Amica has sold me out.  
 570 She pays me back in kind for the merchandise I paid the peddler cash for; sells me in turn. Sold out by her and by myself. Did I know the price? The price of my rag of torment?...

mais seulement à ses convulsions de terreur. Puis, Amica sera décapitée et démembrée. Ses débris bondiront sur les rochers. Non! Non! Je ne veux pas de sa tête tranchée, sur ma poitrine! Rien! Rien d'elle! Et ses longs cheveux bleus autour de mon cou. Ils m'étouffent.

J'ai dû dormir. C'est le matin. Amica n'est pas revenue. Elle a fui. Je suis sûr qu'elle a fui. C'est donc signe qu'elle a mis la main sur ce qu'elle cherchait? Quel indice? Dans quel tiroir? Dans quel coffre? Oh! le plancher brut de l'étable qui absorbe le sang noir!

La montagne doit être cernée. Les policiers et leurs chiens-loups me guettent. Amica m'a vendu. Elle me rend bien la pareille, la marchandise que j'ai payée argent comptant au colporteur. Je suis vendu à mon tour. Par elle et par moi. En savais-je le prix? Le prix de ma guenille en



How much more pain in the bargain? I perceive no standstill ahead. Soon I will be nothing more than a blazing torch.

575

How was I able to get up? I drag myself to the ground floor. Everything is in disorder, drawers opened and turned over. The door to my mother's room has been forced open! I stop, seized by that presence these simple and strewn objects so strongly bring out. Everything my mother ever touched, retains her imprint and rises up against me.

580

The lock on the small desk has been broken. The one and only time I dared open this piece of furniture was the day I acquired Amica. That is where I got the cash she cost me. In my impatience to get to the highway, I almost completely overlooked a certain sealed envelope that broke open as I fingered it. One detail, however, remains very clear in my memory. After having stuffed my pockets, I am certain that I

585

tourment?... Quel surcroît de douleur? Je ne perçois pas de stabilisation. Bientôt, je ne serai plus qu'une torche.

Comment ai-je pu me lever? Je me traîne jusqu'au rez-de-chaussée. Tout est en désordre, les armoires ouvertes et bouleversées. La porte de la chambre de ma mère a été forcée! Je m'arrête, saisi par la présence que les plus pauvres objets, pêle-mêle, accusent si fortement. Tout ce que ma mère a touché garde sa forme et se lève contre moi.

La serrure du petit secrétaire a été fracturée. La dernière et unique fois que j'ai osé ouvrir ce meuble c'était le jour de l'acquisition d'Amica. C'est là que j'ai pris la somme qu'elle m'a coûtée. Dans mon impatience de me mettre en route, je ne prêtai alors aucune attention à une certaine enveloppe cachetée que je brisai après l'avoir tâlée. Un détail, pourtant, reste précis dans ma mémoire. Après avoir empli mes





replaced the envelope, at least half full, back in my mother's large account book from where it came.

590           The ledger is open. I leaf through it. No trace of the envelope. I cannot explain what curiosity makes me go over the pages. I do so with such care and in such minute detail, torn apart by a kind of inner greed. I observe that all my mother's efforts in bookkeeping, sometimes extraordinary ef-  
595           forts, seem to be directed towards the payment of some debt. On the last page, I read this final sentence in her haughty script: "The wages of sin are paid in full."

              I bend down and pick up the empty, torn envelope. Piecing it back together, I can make out some of the same  
600           words as on the last page of the book: "The wages of sin"; and in smaller letters, the words: "To be burned this evening." The date of my mother's death follows underneath.

poches, je suis sûr d'avoir remplacé l'enveloppe à moitié pleine dans le grand livre de comptes de ma mère, là d'où je l'avais retirée.

Le livre de comptes est ouvert. Je le feuillette. Aucune trace d'enveloppe. Je ne sais comment expliquer quelle curiosité m'attache à parcourir ces pages. J'y mets un soin, une minutie, une sorte d'avidité qui me déchire. Je constate que tous les efforts de comptabilité (parfois inouïs) de ma mère semblent tendre à l'extinction d'une dette. A la dernière page, je lis cette dernière phrase tracée par la haute écriture: "Soldé l'argent du mal."

Je me baisse et ramasse par terre l'enveloppe vide et déchirée. Je reconstitue les mêmes mots que sur le cahier: "Argent du mal"; et, en caractères plus petits: "A brûler ce soir." Suit la date même de la mort de ma mère.



Look what Amica has done. She has run off with the wages of sin! She will go into the world, telling what she  
605 found here, and that I am the child of sin, the son of big Claudine. The whole universe will know that I was sin's chosen one from the first breath of my existence.

What is there still left for me to turn myself over to? To myself? To the drama of my very own existence? I have  
610 never thought of self abnegation as a condition for purity. Besides, I cannot be pure. I will never be pure. I give myself up to my fate. I swallow myself up and I am nothing. I cannot imagine my end outside of my own self. There perhaps, is my mistake. Who will teach me the only way out? I am  
615 alone, alone inside of myself.

Voilà ce qu'a fait Amica. Elle s'est sauvée avec l'argent du mal! Elle ira dans le monde, répétant qu'elle l'a trouvé ici, que je suis le fils du mal, le fils de la grande Claudine. L'univers saura que le mal m'a choisi dès le premier souffle de mon existence.

A quoi me faut-il encore renoncer? Serait-ce à moi-même, à mon propre drame? Je n'ai jamais pensé au dépouillement de soi comme condition de l'être pur. D'ailleurs, je ne puis pas être pur. Je ne serai jamais pur. Je me rends à ma fin. Je m'absorbe et je suis néant. Je ne puis imaginer ma fin en dehors de moi. Là est peut-être mon erreur. Qui m'enseignera l'issue possible? Je suis seul, seul en moi.



I am walking. I can go backwards or forwards. Who then, said I was not free? I am weak, but I am walking. I see the Torrent, but I can hardly hear it. Ah! I would never have believed in such lucidity! Wide awake, I juggle with  
 620 the elements of a fever that is calming down. The water is black, whirling, and it spits up yellow spray. I see Amica's head above the cascade. This head that I no longer know how to deal with. Why does it still stay with me? Everything lives within me. I absolutely refuse to come out of myself.  
 625 Her mane of hair takes in the wind like a shadowy veil. It mixes with the water in a long coil of colour, a tempest of black and blue, bordered with white foam. Her hair flows up to me in serrulated waves. It smells of fresh water from the falls and of Amica's unique scent. I want nothing to do with  
 630 her severed head! It spins like a ball! Ah! who wants to buy it now? I have already paid too much for it myself!

Je marche. Je puis faire un pas en arrière, un pas en avant. Qui donc a dit que je n'étais pas libre? Je suis faible, mais je marche. Je vois le torrent, mais je l'entends à peine. Ah! Je n'aurais pas cru à une telle lucidité! Je joue, éveillé, avec les éléments d'une fièvre qui s'apaise. L'eau est noire, toute en tourbillons, et l'écume crache jaune. Je vois la tête d'Amica au-dessus des flots. Cette tête dont je ne sais plus que faire! Pourquoi demeure-t-elle en moi? Tout vit en moi. Je me refuse absolument à sortir de moi. Sa chevelure se prend dans le vent comme une voile de ténèbres. Elle se mêle avec l'eau en un long enroulement, plein de fracas noir et bleu, bordé de blanc. Les cheveux coulent en crochets jusqu'à moi. Ils sentent l'eau douce des chutes et ce parfum unique d'Amica. Sa tête arrachée, non, je n'en veux pas! Elle tournoie comme une balle! Ah! qui veut l'acheter? Moi, j'ai déjà trop mis dessus!





I am tired of looking at the water and of plucking fantastic images out of it. I lean over as far as I can. I am in the mist. My lips taste the stale water.

635           The house, the long and harsh house born of the earth, dissolves inside of me. I see it warp and buckle in the moving water. My mother's room is turned upside down. All the objects of her life spill and spread in the water. Such meagre belongings! Ah! I see a silvered mirror that  
640           someone gave her! Her face is in the mirror, looking at me: "François, look me in the eye."

I bend over as far as I can. I want to see the whirling abyss from as close as possible. I want to lose myself in this adventure. My one and only appalling possession.

(Winter/Spring, 1945)

Je suis fatigué de regarder l'eau et d'y cueillir des images fantastiques. Je me penche tant que je peux. Je suis dans l'embrun. Mes lèvres goûtent l'eau fade.

La maison, la longue et dure maison, née du sol, se dilue aussi en moi. Je la vois se déformer dans les remous. La chambre de ma mère est renversée. Tous les objets de sa vie se répandent dans l'eau. Ils sont pauvres! Ah! je vois un miroir d'argent qu'on lui a donné! Son visage est dedans qui me contemple: "François, regarde-moi dans les yeux."

Je me penche tant que je peux. Je veux voir le gouffre, le plus près possible. Je veux me perdre en mon aventure, ma seule et épouvantable richesse.

(Hiver/printemps, 1945)



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